PUBLIC PRAYER,

A TREATISE IN TWO PARTS.

BRITISH MUSEUM

PUBLIC PRAYER.

A TREATISE IN TWO PARTS.

PART I.

Repreſenting the Advantages and Diſadvantages of Set Forms, and their reſpective Moment in determining the Mode of Public Worſhip.

PART II.

Pointing out the Defects of public Free Prayer, as practiſed among Proteſtant Diſſenters, and directing to proper Methods of Reformation and Improvement in that Mode of Worſhip.

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BRITS. MUSEUM

Advertiſement.

THIS Treatiſe has more than one Author. It was thought proper to advertiſe the Reader of this, that he might know how to account for any diverſity of ſtile, that may appear in the following pages, and for the conſtant uſe of the plural Pronoun (we), which the Authors have uſed to ſignify their general concurrence in the main ſentiments of this Treatiſe, though not ſtrictly to denote their approbation of every word and ſentence, that may occur in the part, that they themſelves reſpectively have not performed.—They have only further to caution the Reader againſt any miſconſtruction of their deſign in ſaying ſo much upon the externals of public worſhip, as they were prompted to it by conſidering how little has been ſaid by others upon

upon this Subject, and how much more proper it was to urge external reverence and decency in a Treatiſe upon public Prayer, and the outward modes thereof, than, if they had been treating only of Prayer in general, or ſecret Prayer in particular. They hope, the Reader will find, that they are far from laying any undue ſtreſs upon externals when placed in compariſon with thoſe internal exerciſes of the mind and heart, which are moſt eſſential to all acceptable Prayer.

28 OC 62

CONTENTS.

Page

INTRODUCTION, 1

PART I.

CHAP. I.

The Advantages of Forms, 13

CHAP. II.

A Review of the Advantages of Forms, 18

CHAP. III.

The Diſadvantages of Forms, 39

CHAP. IV.

A Review of the Diſadvantages of Forms, 48

PART II.

INTRODUCTION, 63

CHAP. I.

The little Reverence appearing in many who join in public Free-Prayer frankly owned, and cenſured, 71

CHAP. II.

The Cauſes of Irreverence and apparent Indevotion in thoſe who join in public Free Prayer enquired into, 79

CHAP.

CONTENTS.

CHAP. III.

A reverent Behaviour in Public Prayer recommended and enforced, 86

CHAP. IV.

The Scriptural Poſture of the Body in public Prayer, particularly conſidered, 94

CHAP. V.

The proper Actings of the Soul in thoſe who join in Public Prayer, 99

CHAP. VI.

The Nature and Propriety of vocal Reſponſes in public Prayer conſidered, and the Practice recommended, 117

CHAP. VII.

Rules of Advice, addreſſed to the Leader in Public Free Prayer, 132

The CONCLUSION, 154

INTRODUCTION.

PRAYER is a duty founded in the *nature* and *reaſon* of things, enforced by the Authority of *Divine Revelation*, and recommended by the *example* of wiſe and good Men in all ages: Amongſt Chriſtians, therefore, the Obligation and Importance of the Duty in itſelf can never paſs for a mere matter of doubtful diſputation: But it is very poſſible, that perſons well agreed, as to the Duty itſelf, may entertain different ſentiments, be governed by different views, or influenced by different taſtes and reliſhes with reſpect to the external mode or manner of performing it. It is not in the leaſt preſumed or pretended that the *Subject* of the following treatiſe is of the laſt importance to Religion; and it is hoped that nothing will be found in it expreſſive of an undue Warmth, or ill-proportioned Zeal.—The *Subject* however may be juſtly allowed to be of ſome conſequence, tho' not the greateſt. A common Art, that is uſeful to the purpoſes of Life, may be more uſeful in one way of Performance, or Application, than another; and he is truly a friend to Mankind, who, by juſt reaſoning from obvious Principles, or plain

facts, points out and recommends the moſt excellent way, in which they, who practiſe the Art, may do it to the greateſt advantage, and promote the greateſt public Good. Whether this Treatiſe be ſo happy with reſpect to its Subject, muſt be left to the judgment of its Readers, who will perhaps be favorable enough to allow it well meant, if they cannot grant it to be well executed.

The firſt Part of this *Deſign* is to ſhew the greater expediency and uſefulneſs of free Prayer than of Forms. By Free Prayer is meant that manner of Devotion, wherein the perſon addreſſing God, expreſſes his deſires before him in the exerciſe of the faculties of his own mind, his Underſtanding, Judgment, Memory and Affections, according to the preſent ſenſe of his mind and heart, and, ſo far as he is able, agreeably to the preſent circumſtances, in which he and thoſe who worſhip with him are placed. By *Forms* of Prayer are meant devotional compoſitions, wherein the officiating perſon is confined to the words written or printed before his eyes, as the matter of his addreſſes to God, and of theirs, who join with him. Free Prayer is not ſuppoſed to exclude the beſt uſe a man can make of his natural abilities, and all proper helps for their improvement by reading, premeditation, or the like. Forms of Prayer admit more or leſs latitude in the uſe of them. They may be uſed only as helps to the

the memory of the Officiator, and be varied at diſcretion, as the mind enlarged with pious affection may dictate, or circumſtances and occaſions require. The difference between Forms thus uſed, and Free Prayer, tho' conſiderable, is not ſufficient to conſtitute them different modes. Forms alſo may be ſo limited in their uſe by the conſent of Miniſters and People, or by public Authority, as to confine thoſe, who lead the public devotions, to the particular expreſſions that lie before them, without altering, adding to, or taking from them. To theſe the above definition anſwers, as being ſet, ſtated, or preſcribed; and it is with a view to theſe, that this Treatiſe claims the Reader's candid attention.

It is no original part of this *deſign* to enter into the conſideration of the Authority and Antiquity of the two Modes of Prayer: Only it may not be improper to give a few ſtrictures on theſe topics.

As to the point of Authority, let it be obſerved,

1ſt. The Scripture neither expreſsly enjoins, nor forbids, by any poſitive precept or prohibition, the praying with a Form, or without one: The manner of praying ſtands upon the ſame foot in this reſpect, as it did before any written Revelation was given to mankind, for any thing, that is expreſsly preſcribed to limit or determine it this way or the other.

2dly. Nevertheleſs one mode of worſhip may be better, and more eligible than another, tho' it is not enjoined, as univerſally neceſſary in all caſes; and if any one mode of worſhip is preferable to another, the preference muſt be juſtly due to the primitive mode, whatever that might be, for doubtleſs Chriſt, and his Apoſtles, and all their pious followers in the firſt and pureſt ages, worſhipped God in the beſt way and manner. But

3dly. The practice of the Primitive Church, ſo far as can be collected from the New Teſtament, is in favour of Free-Prayer; conſequently this mode of worſhip may juſtly claim the preference ſtill among Chriſtians, unleſs it can be ſhewn to have been peculiarly proper for that age of miracles, as being conducted under the guidance and influence of extraordinary divine Inſpiration: A thing, which, tho' pretended by ſome, yet remains to be proved.

Upon the whole the ſilence of Scripture precept *itſelf* with reſpect to the particular mode of prayer, argues much more ſtrongly for Free Prayer than for Forms, in as much as it is not to be ſuppoſed, that the great Founder of the Chriſtian Church would have left it without Forms, or given no direction for the compoſition of them, if they had been abſolutely neceſſary, or generally expedient and uſeful. He has not thought *fit* to lay any reſtraint upon the ſpirits of his Miniſters or People in

in their holy converſe with God, but allows them to expreſs their *own* deſires to God with all the freedom and boldneſs, that is conſiſtent with the reverence due to his Divine Majeſty, and the nature of the Duty itſelf. Why then ſhould we *make ourſelves over-wiſe* or over-officious, to reſtrain or limit either in ourſelves or others, what he has left free.

As to the point of Antiquity; be it obſerved,

1ſt. "The ancient Jews in their Temple-wor-
"ſhip had not any public Forms to pray by, nor
"any public Miniſters to officiate to them here-
"in, but all prayed in private by themſelves, and
"all according to their own private conceptions."
(So the learned *Dr. Prideaux tells us) "And
"therefore (adds he) our Saviour in the parable
"of the Publican and Phariſee, *Luke* xviii. 10—
"13, making them to go up both together into
"the Temple to pray, introduceth them there,
"as each making his own Prayer for himſelf."
In the page immediately preceding, he obſerves alſo,
"that the Jews having had no Synagogues till after
"the Babyloniſh Captivity, till then, they had
"not any ſet Forms for their Prayers." And
tho' he labours to prove, that they had ſet Forms
in their Synagogue Worſhip in our Saviour's time,
the evidence of his premiſes is much too ſlender

* Vide Connection, p. 1. b. 6. vol. II. p. 549.

to ſupport his concluſion againſt Diſſenters and their way of Worſhip. Some of theſe Prayers, by his own confeſſion *, ſeem to have been compoſed after the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, and in the paſſage of the Miſhna by him referred to, we do not find (notwithſtanding the confidence of his aſſertion) the leaſt mention made of any Prayers as old ſettled Forms. All that is there ſaid reſpects the manner of uſing the 18 Prayers, and the opinions of certain Rabbies about it, which proves only that they were then (*i. e.* about 150 or 200 years after Chriſt) in uſe, but aſcertains nothing in regard of their ſuppoſed high Antiquity †.

2. As to Chriſtian Antiquity, it is allowed by ‡ the moſt celebrated and learned writers in favour of Forms, that Free-prayer was the primitive mode of Worſhip among Chriſtians. Lord

* Prideaux's Connection, Pt. 1. B. 6. Vol. II. Note at the bottom of P. 538.

† N. B. For the ſatisfaction of ſome Readers we ſhall give a literal Tranſlation of the paſſage in queſtion from Surenhuſius's Edition of the Miſhna, *Tit. Beracboth, Cap.* 4. §. 3. *P.* 14. *Tom.* 1. " *Rabban Gamaliel dicit; ſingulis diebus quiſque recitat preces Octodenas. R. Joſua dicit; quod ad ſcopum Octodenarum faciat. R. Akiba cenſet; Si cui precatio expedita ſit in ore, Octodenas precabitur; Sin minus, quod ad ſcopum Octodenarum faciat.*

‡ See Examination of the Preface to the Chriſtian Common-Prayer Book, p. 32. And the Authors mentioned in the note there.

Chan-

Chancellor King ſpeaks his ſentiments very freely*: "There is not (ſaith he) the leaſt mention of "prescribed Forms in any of the primitive writ-"ings, nor the leaſt word or ſyllable tending "thereto, that I can find, which is a moſt un-"accountable ſilence, if ever ſuch there were, "but rather ſome expreſſions intimating the con-"trary." And afterwards he ſaith, "that the "words or expreſſions in the Prayers of the pri-"mitive Churches were not impoſed or preſcrib-"ed, but left to the prudence, choice, or judg-"ment of every particular Biſhop or officiating "Miniſter, who delivered himſelf in ſuch terms "as beſt pleaſed him, and varied his petitions ac-"cording to the preſent circumſtances and emer-"gencies: Or if it be more intelligible, that the "primitive Chriſtians had no ſtinted Liturgies or "impoſed Forms of Prayer." Dr. T. Bennet, a Divine of the Church of England, and Author of a brief Hiſtory of the joint-uſe of pre-compoſed ſet Forms, with all his learning and great good-will to the cauſe of Liturgies, has not been able to invalidate the aſſertion of his learned Lay-Brother before-mentioned, for he has not produced ſo much as one inſtance, that has the leaſt appearance in favour of a Liturgy, in the two firſt centuries, and but three teſtimonies in the third century, which, if rightly attended to, will be found

* Enquiry into the Conſtitution, &c. of the Primitive Church, part 2. chap. 2.

to weaken rather than ſtrengthen the cauſe he labours to ſupport by them.

3dly. The firſt introduction of Forms into the Chriſtian Church was upon an occaſion by no means honourable to them, namely, the groſs ignorance and ſcandalous inſufficiency of ſome Miniſters towards the cloſe of the fourth and beginning of the fifth century, as has been clearly ſhewn by ſeveral Writers. "It is not denied "(ſays a learned * Writer) but there were ſome "Forms of Prayer of old, viz. arbitrary and par-"ticular, ſuch as this or that perſon compoſed "himſelf, or made choice of compoſed by others, "for his uſe in public. There is an intimation of "this latter ſort, *Can.* 23. *Con. Carthag.* 3. held "in the concluſion of the 4th age, and it is the "firſt that I meet with. But common Forms "(though arbitrary) viz. ſuch as many Churches "made uſe of in the ſame words, I cannot diſ-"cover till many years after; unleſs the Lord's "Prayer be made an inſtance hereof."

From this brief view of the caſe between Free Prayer and Forms, we cannot but look upon the former as moſt conformable to the Scripture and primitive pattern; and if it ſhall appear in the ſequel of this Treatiſe, that *it* has likewiſe greater

* Clarkſon on Liturgies, p. 2.

advan-

advantages attending it than Forms, the Reader may judge for himſelf, whether Diſſenters have any ſufficient reaſon to forſake the *good old way* of their Fathers: They have *none* ariſing from the way itſelf; if the reaſoning of this Treatiſe holds good. They have *none* (as is preſumed) ariſing from the ſame State of things amongſt themſelves with *that* which gave the firſt riſe to Liturgies, viz. the ignorance and inſufficiency of their Miniſters: They have *none*, that we know of, ariſing from the views of Union and Coalition with the eſtabliſhed Church; we hear of no overtures of this ſort made or likely to be made to them; and if ever they ſhould be made, the proper and prudent way of ſeconding them is, not for Diſſenters to ſet up Liturgies of their own.

We are ready to flatter ourſelves, that our Readers, after an attentive peruſal of the following pages, will not raſhly condemn or cenſure the preſent mode of worſhip amongſt Diſſenters, but allow it to have advantages, that may appear in a light ſufficient to influence honeſt and upright minds: And to expreſs our charitable ſentiments on the other hand, notwithſtanding that we are firmly perſuaded of the excellency of Free Prayer in general above all ſtated pre-compoſed Forms, yet we can eaſily conceive, that the latter may, in ſome views, appear to the minds of pious and thinking men, the more excellent way. In a

word, we can ſee reaſon for mutual charity and forbearance, though we are not in ſuch a ſtate of Indifference, as would make it but a reaſonable piece of complaiſance to follow the example of our neighbours, which way ſoever it lead us.

The deſign of the latter part of this Treatiſe will, we hope, appear to our Readers adapted to ſerve valuable practical ends and purpoſes, and may prevent the whole from being ſlighted as a *mere piece of controverſy*. As it is addreſſed to the Diſſenters, with a view to the improvement of their preſent manner of conducting public worſhip; if it appear to have any proper tendency that way, it may perhaps in ſome meaſure anſwer *their* demands, who call for ſome improvement in their preſent mode of worſhip, and are ready fondly to fall in with ſchemes that quite change and deſtroy it, under a miſtaken or fallacious pretence of reforming it.

To conclude this Introduction. In this, as in all other matters of debate, the Judgment may be eaſily influenced by taking a partial view only of the queſtion. For inſtance; Here is one perſon, who having obſerved the manifold diſorders and confuſions of jarring parties, becomes a paſſionate admirer of Chriſtian Unity, and thinks a public Liturgy the only or moſt likely means to ſecure it, by bringing men to an Uniformity in their devotions, and laying a curb upon their licentious fancies

cies and paſſions. Another ſhudders at the improprieties and indecencies incident to extempore Prayer; his ears have been grated with grammatical blunders, or mean and vulgar phraſes; his eyes painfully impreſſed with unnatural diſtortions and affected ſtrainings; and his delicacy in many reſpects greatly diſguſted: To eaſe himſelf of theſe diſagreeable inconveniencies, he flies to Liturgic worſhip, and thinks all the world ſhould prefer it, for the ſake of propriety, decency, exactneſs, and accuracy in their public addreſſes to the Moſt High. Another thinks it too great an indulgence for Miniſters to do nothing in the public ſervice but *read*; and too great a diſparagement to their abilities, as if they were capable of nothing better: He is not ſure but thoſe, who, out of choice, or from a regard to Authority, read other men's Prayers, may, out of choice, or from a regard to their own eaſe, read other men's Sermons; and greatly ſuſpects, that Forms, while they tend to cramp the genius, obſcure the abilities and impriſon the gifts of ſome, ſerve only to diſguiſe and conceal from public view the poverty and nakedneſs of others. It will be more apparent, ſays he to himſelf, whether Miniſters read and ſtudy their Bibles and other good Books, when they cannot, with any advantage, conduct public worſhip in the way of Free-Prayer without ſuch application;

and this he thinks a good reaſon why a Liturgy ſhould not be encouraged, leſt it ſhould encourage idleneſs and careleſſneſs in the Clergy. Another feels a ſtrong paſſion for novelty and variety, ſo that he cannot think of moving in a conſtant track of public devotion, no more than he ſhould love to hear the beſt diſcourſe that ever was compoſed repeated in his ears from Sabbath to Sabbath, or ſhould be ſatisfied with the orderly repetition of a ſmall ſet of ſuch diſcourſes. The Goſpel affords ſo much ſcope for the Genius of Man to exerciſe itſelf in a variety of Sentiment and Expreſſion, that he would gladly find the pleaſure and advantage of Genius thus applied in every part of its public Miniſtrations.

Such are the partial lights, in which different perſons may view this argument; but it is the profeſſed deſign of this Treatiſe, to give an impartial repreſentation of the whole matter in debate; and it is hoped that the attentive Reader will at leaſt be led by it to an extenſive view of the Subject; and that it may be ſome advantage to have his mind opened in larger conceptions, as it may qualify him for a more juſt, rational, and candid determination on the one or the other ſide of the Queſtion.

PUBLIC PRAYER.

PART I.

CHAP. I.

The Advantages of Forms.

THE moſt conſiderable advantages of forms are theſe that follow.

1. Set forms "eſtabliſh and ſecure the unity of faith and worſhip, reduce all the churches to an uniformity, prevent any diſagreement or contradiction in their petitions, and inſtruct them, as they worſhip the ſame God, to worſhip him with the ſame mind and voice *."

2. Forms of Prayer are an uſeful and in ſome caſes neceſſary relief to the infirmities of mankind; particularly, in times of general and prevailing ignorance, when few are to be found, otherwiſe capable of conducting the public devotions, with tolerable propriety or decency: For inſtance, at the time of the Reformation, when Religious knowledge began to dawn after a long

* Vide Dr. Newton's (preſent Biſhop of Briſtol) Serm. on the Liturgy of the Church of England, p. 17.

ob-

obſcure night of Popiſh ignorance, the credit of the Proteſtant cauſe might be better ſupported by a public form of miniſtration, both in Prayer and Preaching, in many inſtances, than if the whole ſervice had been left to the diſcretionary management of an ignorant and inſufficient Clergy.

3. Set forms claim the honour and advantage of exact and accurate compoſition.—Where they are introduced, it is reaſonable to ſuppoſe that Learning, Genius, and Study will all be employed, to give the higheſt poſſible finiſhing to them, and in the uſe of ſuch forms, the Worſhippers depend not on the abilities of their Miniſter, whether they muſt offer up proper and becoming petitions in ſuitable language and method: Whereas the Performer in free Prayer is liable to run into much incoherence and inconſequence, to violate Grammar, apply mean and vulgar phraſes, uſe tedious repetitions, dwell too largely upon ſome topics, and omit or glance too ſlightly upon others, and the like, which cannot fail of expoſing the public offices of Religion to ſome degree of contempt or neglect.

4. Set forms are an uſeful curb upon the wild fancies and licentious paſſions of ſome men, that may be employed in leading the public devotions. How apt have ſome been, with more zeal than judgment, to bring much of their own doubtful opinions, or wrong principles, either in Religion

or

or Politics, and even their own private paſſions and reſentments into their public Prayers; and ſo to manage matters, as if they were ſure God was of their party, or had a deſign to make him ſo. When ſuch weak and hot-headed men get into the Service of the Churches, and are at liberty to ſay what they liſt to God Almighty, they cannot but expoſe the moſt ſolemn part of the public miniſtrations to contempt, and cauſe many to *abhor the offering of the Lord.* Whereas a public form puts the words of truth and ſoberneſs into the mouth of the miniſter, and ſecures ſuch addreſſes to be offered for himſelf, and the people, as contain in them ſentiments of undoubted truth and the higheſt importance.

5. Set forms give people the advantage of bearing a vocal part in the public prayers. "And their attention is hereby both quickened and engaged, which might be apt to ſtray the more, if they ſhould bear no part in the whole ſervice; for when the people bear a ſhare in the performance of this duty, they muſt expect it before it come, that they may be ready, when it is come; they muſt obſerve that they may be right, and after take heed to prepare againſt the next anſwer they are to give *." The Miniſter is not the only ſpeaker, as if he alone was concerned; nor are

* See Whitby's Proteſtant Reconciler, Part 2. Chap. 11.

the

the people betrayed into a diſſipation of thought from the known difficulty of keeping up a ſilent attention and fixedneſs of mind, while he is carrying on the ſeveral parts of the ſacred ſervice; at proper intervals, their attention is called up by a vocal reſponſe, or an audible Amen.

6. The people, who worſhip by a preſcribed Form, are apprized beforehand of what they ſhould join in as their addreſs to God. When the people depend upon their Miniſter for the matter of their Prayer, there muſt be more uncertainty whether it will be ſuch as they can conſcientiouſly join in. They muſt hear in order to underſtand; and underſtand in order to judge; and if what they have heard, be agreeable; they adopt it, and offer it as the devout breathing of their hearts to God; the mind paſſes thro' this proceſs as the Miniſter is uttering, or as ſoon as he has uttered a ſentence in prayer; and yet it is no ſooner uttered, than he is going on to another part of his Prayer, that requires the ſame operation. Thus the Hearer is kept in painful ſuſpence and doubtful heſitation, and has little ſcope left for the exerciſe of his devout affections. "Now when we know before-hand the words that are to be uſed, or may have them before our eyes; the ſoul is at perfect leiſure to ſuit and raiſe and change her affections according to the importance of every word; whereas while the ſoul is held in ſuſpence about the meaning of a ſentence, till ſuch time

as

as it is finiſhed (as it muſt neceſſarily happen in extemporary Prayer) ſhe is in a great meaſure deprived of this advantageous leiſure; and tho' the imagination be ſtill kept buſy, yet the affections can never follow, but by ſtarts and with diſorder *."

This repreſentation of the advantages of Forms does, ſo far as appears to us, include every thing of importance, that has been urged in their favour; and if any defect be charged upon it; the charge, it is preſumed, will amount to nothing more than the want of ſome Rhetorical colourings or flouriſhes, which have ſometimes been applied to the Subject; but are utterly foreign to the argument before us.

* Edward Young's Sermons, V. 1. p. 256.

CHAP. II.

A review of the Advantages of Forms.

THE Unity of the Chriſtian Church, the Decency of Chriſtian Worſhip, and the Devotion of Chriſtian Worſhippers are the three grand objects, which *they* muſt have in view, who plead the advantages of Forms enumerated in the foregoing Chapter; and he is not worthy the name of a Chriſtian, who regards any of them with indifference, much leſs who treats them with neglect or contempt. Whoever therefore is influenced by a regard to theſe objects, in giving the preference to Forms above free Prayer; we muſt applaud the goodneſs of his principles, tho' we cannot aſſert the juſtice of his concluſion; for in order to juſtify a concluſion from theſe principles or premiſes againſt free Prayer; *it* muſt be ſhewn to be inconſiſtent with them either abſolutely and in its own nature; or comparatively and in a greater degree than Forms. Should we ſay that *it* is abſolutely and in its own nature inconſiſtent with them; we are guilty of the groſſeſt uncharitableneſs, and condemn by wholeſale as *no Chriſtians*, all, who have uſed it from the firſt commencement of Chriſtianity in the World; ſhould we ſay that it is inconſiſtent with them only com-

comparatively, and in a greater degree than Forms; the merits of the cauſe in that reſpect remain now to be tried.

As to the Unity of the Chriſtian Church, which Forms are ſuppoſed to ſecure and advance in a greater degree than Free Prayer; we obſerve that Chriſtian Unity and Eccleſiaſtical Uniformity are two things in ſome Men's Ideas ſtrangely confounded; and yet in their own nature, far from being ſo connected, as that they muſt neceſſarily ſtand or fall together. The former is converſant about the inward ſubſtantial and vital parts of Chriſtianity, things eſſential to a Chriſtian as ſuch; the latter about circumſtantial matters, points of mere ceremony and form, things no more eſſential to a perſon as a Chriſtian, than his particular features, motion or dreſs are neceſſary to his being a man, or one of the human kind. The one admits variety in ſpeculative opinions and external modes of Religion; the other fixes an invariable ſtandard to which the conſciences of men muſt be ſtretched, and by which their practice muſt be determined in doubtful, or confeſſedly indifferent matters. The one is founded in humility, and cemented by charity and love; the other takes its riſe from a ſpirit of Domination, and requires fines, impriſonments, and worldly terrors effectually to ſupport it. The one conſiſts with free enquiry and mutual forbearance; the other damps

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or deſtroys them. *Thro' Chriſt we have acceſs by one Spirit unto the Father.* Eph. ii. 18. Thus does an inſpired Apoſtle expreſs the common privilege of all true Chriſtians, and exhibit the grand point in which all the great lines of true Chriſtian Faith and worſhip unite as their common centre. They who worſhip the Father *through* the Son, as the only Mediator, and *by* the Spirit, with humble reliance on his gracious aids, ſenſible that they are in themſelves unworthy to be accepted, and of themſelves unable to perform their duty in an acceptable manner, unite in the main eſſentials of the Chriſtian profeſſion and worſhip, how much ſoever they be in other reſpects divided.

As to an agreement in the ſame Form of addreſs to God, it is as eaſy to conceive how Chriſtian Unity may ſubſiſt amidſt variety in the exerciſe of Free Prayer; as how the ſeveral bodies-corporate in a kingdom may all unite in addreſſing their Prince, each in their own manner, and according to their own particular ſentiments and circumſtances, but all with ſuch harmonious expreſſions of Loyalty, as ſhew them well affected to his government; and ſuch a general agreement in the matter of their addreſſes, as ſhews them all to have the ſame confidence in his Royal Wiſdom and Goodneſs for the common bleſſings of an equal government, and ſuch particular favours as are ſuitable to their reſpective circumſtances, and conſiſtent

ſiſtent with the general good. It is indeed natural to expect ſome difference in the addreſſes preſented by different bodies of men; as for inſtance, an Houſe of Convocation, and a number of Diſſenting Miniſters, and it is poſſible they may contradict one another: But if one petition only for the protection of the Church eſtabliſhed by Law, and the ſecurity of her privileges and revenues; and the other for the maintainance of Toleration and Religious Liberty, here is Difference without Contradiction; and a wiſe and gracious Prince (ſuch as we have reaſon to eſteem his preſent Majeſty) may look upon them both as his very good ſubjects, and return them both a very gracious anſwer. A Form of common addreſs to prevent diſagreement or contradiction in the addreſſes of his Majeſty's Subjects, would be a new, unheard of, and ſtrange device indeed; and why they ſhould have a Form of Common Prayer to prevent the like inconvenience in their addreſſes to the King of Heaven, is not eaſy to underſtand; unleſs we ſuppoſe, what ought not to be once admitted into our imaginations, that there is no allowance to be had in the Court of Heaven for the different byaſſes of mankind from particular ſentiments, paſſions, and intereſts, which ſometimes affect their worſhip; or that God exacts from thoſe, that worſhip him, a ſeeming and outward

outward agreement more perfect, than he knows can in this imperfect ſtate of things, really and inwardly take place amongſt thinking and inquiſitive minds.

Upon the whole, it is hard to conceive, why in providing for Unity of Faith and Worſhip, ſo particular a ſtreſs ſhould be laid upon the uſe of one Common Form of Prayer; and yet the matter be left abſolutely undetermined in reſpect of public preaching. Muſt Miniſters and People uſe the very ſame words in Prayer to prevent contradiction and diſagreement; and yet the public inſtructions be left to the diſcretion of every Miniſter, and the conſequence, that Doctrines as widely diſtant from one another, as Earth and Heaven, are taught to the people, be thought no breach of Unity? Is it of ſuch vaſt importance to prevent diſagreement in what Miniſters ſpeak as the mouth of the people to God; and yet of no importance to prevent the like diſagreement in what they deliver as the Mouth of God to the People? Shall the fear of diſcord and contradiction lay a reſtraint upon the Miniſter's buſineſs in the Deſk; and yet that fear vaniſh, when his buſineſs is transferred to the Pulpit? The deſire of Unity does not operate uniformly in theſe two caſes. There was a * time, indeed, when this paſſion had its effect both ways, and the ſpirit of

* The time of Laud's Archiepiſcopal Domination.

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Uniformity affected both the Deſk and the Pulpit alſo in a conſiderable degree. But all true lovers of Civil and Religious Liberty wiſh never to ſee the precedents of that time brought into the imitation and practice of this or any future age, and they will be cautious of pleading for uniformity of Prayer upon principles, which purſued to their genuine conſequences, lead to the moſt pernicious infringements of the Religious Liberties of mankind.

The Decency of Chriſtian Worſhip, is another Object worthy of regard in an enquiry of this nature. If Decency be baniſhed from the Houſe of God, the public miniſtrations of Religion muſt ſink into contempt, or cannot engage that delightful attention of the mind, which is favourable to Devotion. Now Free Prayer ſtands charged with *high crimes and miſdemeanours* committed againſt the decency of worſhip, of which Liturgies are not guilty. How far the charge is juſt and well grounded remains to be examined.

It is acknowledged that the ſame degree of propriety and exactneſs is not ordinarily attainable in Free Prayer, as in Forms. Can the greateſt Maſters in Learning and Eloquence reach that exactneſs in diſcourſe without a written help, that they may do with it, by delivering what is penned before them, and is the fruit of their cloſeſt retired

retired contemplations? It is folly and preſumption to pretend it. We therefore very willingly yield the cauſe to Forms ſo far as to allow them a greater *poſſible* accuracy than Free Prayer. But at the ſame time we muſt obſerve that between the higheſt and loweſt degree of that Decency, which regards the Style, Sentiment, or Method in Public Prayer, there are ſeveral intermediate degrees ſufficient for the purpoſes of piety and devotion, within which Free Prayer under the management of Miniſters of richer or poorer talents may fall, ſo as always to be above contempt, and ſometimes to come near the utmoſt attainable exactneſs of a Form. "In their Prayers men are not to ſtudy fineneſs but decency, not to declaim as *(oſtentatious* and *florid)* Orators, but to ſpeak as *(modeſt* and *pious)* men." So ſpeaks a famous * advocate for forms and virulent adverſary to Free Prayer, and herein ſpeaks very juſtly, though more favourably to the cauſe he oppoſed than he intended; for many who cannot attain to Fineneſs, come within the bounds of Decency, many, who cannot declaim as Orators, know how to ſpeak plain common ſenſe as men, without reading a Paper, or ſaying a Leſſon. We are the more obliged to him for ſo uſeful a hint, becauſe we apprehend, that nothing has contributed

* Dr. South's Sermons on Eccleſ. v. 2.

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more to expoſe Free Prayer, than a vain affectation of Fineneſs and Oratory, which ſome attempting without neceſſity in the nature of the thing, without ſufficient furniture in themſelves, and it is to be feared from a principle of pride and vainglory, have ſometimes ſunk ſhamefully into *nonſenſe and incoherence, confuſion and impertinence.* In conducting Public Prayer, there is undoubtedly an happy mean between a rude negligence and coarſeneſs on the one hand, and a finical niceneſs on the other; a mean, which falls within the compaſs of ordinary capacities properly applied and improved, and is at once moſt ſuitable to the nature of the Duty, and moſt edifying to the generality of Worſhippers. But who can excuſe, the high indecency of men's giving vent to their own weak fancies and ungoverned paſſions in the public Prayers? We ſhall not in the leaſt attempt it. Let thoſe upon whom ſuch indecency is chargeable bear their own burden. But for a poſſible, or in ſome few inſtances actual inconvenience of this kind, we cannot give up the cauſe of free Prayer. Sound Learning and real Piety both muſt be at a lower ebb, than we can imagine them to be in the preſent age, before ſuch an inconvenience can be common or general; and ſuppoſing it common or general, the uſe of a Form would be but a partial and imperfect remedy. The true way of curing this evil, if common, would be,

to take meaſures for the education and encouragement of a learned and pious Clergy, and then as little ſcandal would accrue to Religion from a few in one way, who might poſſibly utter ſtrange and wrong things in their public Prayers; as from a few in another way, who may poſſibly read an excellent Form in a ſtrange and little leſs than profane manner.

For Facts to ſhew it poſſible and probable, that the alledged inconvenience of Free Prayer might become ſcandalouſly common, if that mode of worſhip were authorized or generally received, we are * often referred to the times before the Reſtoration. Now all the inſtances of abuſe in Free Prayer, that the Hiſtory of thoſe times can furniſh, prove only that it was then, and ſo far abuſed, not that it muſt, or would be ſo abuſed again in ordinary; for it would be eaſy to ſhew that there was an extraordinary concurrence of circumſtances in thoſe times to occaſion that abuſe, but it is enough to ſay here in general, that they were times of great public diſtraction both in Church and State, on Civil and Religious accounts, and it may be eaſily conceived, that the minds of men were then agitated, diſturbed, and inflamed to a degree ſufficient in ſome inſtances to ſet aſide, and in others to weaken their regard to prudence and

* See particularly White's ſecond Letter, p. 54. and Edwards's Gangrene there quoted.

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decorum. All the Facts therefore that can be produced in ſo extraordinary a period of Civil and Eccleſiaſtical confuſions, are nothing to the purpoſe of proving that Free Prayer either is not, or cannot be conducted in ordinary with decency and to edification. Had a Liturgy been uſed in thoſe days, will ſome ſay, there would not have been the leaſt offence of this kind. A weak and groundleſs preſumption: as might be made to appear from * Facts of a ſimilar kind, but we rather chuſe to illuſtrate it by an eaſy ſuppoſition. Suppoſe then, that, in the times before mentioned, when the old Liturgy was laid aſide, a new one had been framed for the uſe of the Churches, and countenanced or enforced by the then Higher Powers, who can doubt, but ſome portion of the ſpirit of the times would have been infuſed into it, and broad hints, at leaſt, given of an *holy* deſire for the deſtruction and utter extirpation of Monarchy, Hierarchy, and the like? who can imagine, but the occaſional Forms of humiliation and thankſgiving, (which in thoſe times would have been very frequent,) would have received a ſtill ſtronger tincture of the times, as being more fully adapted to particular circumſtances, and events, and compoſed under the influence of warmer paſ-

* If any would know what theſe facts are, we refer them for ſatisfaction to Robinſon's Anſwer to Bennet, Chap. 6.

ſions? Now let the moſt zealous advocate for Liturgic worſhip only conſider, whether ſuch a Liturgy and ſuch Forms would not have been a more laſting and notorious ſcandal to Religion, than thoſe Free Prayers could be, which were the extravagant effuſions only of particular zealots, while the more wiſe, ſerious, and moderate Clergy (of which there were many in thoſe days,) led the public devotions in a very different manner, and to the beſt purpoſes. Happy indeed for theſe good men, that they had no Liturgic Fetters laid upon them.

Further, it is matter of no ſmall offence to ſome, that the Public Prayers ſhould give ſo uncertain a ſound in points of Doctrine, as they do in the free Way. Omiſſions perhaps diſpleaſe, but Contradictions ſhock them. If their paſſions are not influenced by a zeal for what they count Orthodoxy, their delicacy notwithſtanding is greatly offended: By what? Not by the mere difference of ſentiment, for we ſuppoſe them poſſeſſed of Candor ſufficient to excuſe it; but by the indecent affectation of diſplaying a difference of Opinion, and preaching as it were upon points of Doctrine in Prayer, which may juſtly offend a judicious and candid hearer. We leave *that* to all the cenſure it deſerves; but not without obſerving, that it ſeems to us more tolerable to hear a Prayer uttered according to the Miniſter's conceptions,

tions, that is clearly of a piece with the Sermon he preaches, than to hear a Form of Prayer ſolemnly read, that is in many reſpects of a quite different make and aſpect, from the diſcourſe that follows, or carries an apparent contradiction to it; nay, that it is as tolerable for Miniſters to expreſs different ſentiments in their conceived Prayers, provided it be done with modeſty, as to uſe the ſame words of Prayer with a known and avowed difference in the ſenſe they put upon them. Their Prayers in this caſe, are not the ſame before God, who ſees and knows the ſecret meanings of their hearts, nor before Men, ſo far as their different meanings are openly and publicly known and avowed. It is therefore no great Paradox to ſay, That Men may pray by the ſame Form, and yet not pray the ſame Prayer. Liturgies can only prevent the outward appearance of different or contrary opinions in the Public Prayers, and if they could do more than that, they would not be more neceſſary to prevent different or contrary doctrines from being wrought into the public Prayers, than Homilies would be to prevent their being taught as the word of God to the people.

To conclude this topic, "we cannot queſtion, but (as a pious * Divine of the Church of Eng-

* Jenks on Liberty of Prayer, p. 59.

land expreſſes himſelf) there have been many and groſs abuſes of this way (meaning the free way) of praying, which if raked together, may furniſh out matter enough for Satire; but if the abuſes muſt lay an embargo on the uſe, I know not what Prayers then of any ſort will be left us, or what will become of the Common Prayer itſelf, but it muſt ceaſe to be common, or to be at all, becauſe many have made as wretched work with *that*, as ever was made of Free Prayer. Some would heavily reſent it for a moſt tyrannical impoſition, to be tied up from ever meddling with a Bottle of Wine, becauſe it has happened with too many, that "when the Wine was in, the Wit was out." We are therefore of the ſame Author's mind, when he ſays, "I ſhould methinks be more wary than wiſe, never to truſt any Phyſician or Proctor, becauſe it is poſſible they may abuſe me, nor ever to join with another in Prayer, becauſe I know not beforehand all that he will ſay, nor can tell, but a word may drop, that I do not like *."

The Devotion of Chriſtian Worſhippers, is another object of great importance in this diſquiſition. That muſt be the beſt manner of worſhip, which beſt promotes the great end of worſhip, by exciting and cheriſhing pious attention and af-

* Jenks on Liberty of Prayer, p. 195.

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fections. Now, that ſtated Forms do not require a very cloſe and fixed attention is in effect acknowledged by the beſt advocates for them, for it is one of their boaſted advantages, that by being known before-hand, and ſo requiring leſs attention, they leave more room for the exerciſe of the affections; whereas Free Prayer is charged with requiring too much attention to admit of affection. Well, if Free Prayer require too much, that Forms may not ſeem to require too little, the Compoſers of them have hit upon the expedient of Reſponſes, that the People may not want ſomething to ſay or do in order to awaken their attention, when it grows flat for want of novelty and variety to excite and engage it. This Expedient does, we own, ſecure ſome attention to the part the people are to act in the public ſervice, but whether it is favourable to a true devotional fixed attention may be juſtly queſtioned. The ſerious ſettled attention of devout minds is moſt favoured by the ſolemn ſilence of all, but him, who is the common ſpeaker, and muſt naturally be broken and hindered by the confuſed murmur of diſcordant voices. The indevout, as may juſtly be ſuſpected, have no attention excited or engaged by reſponſes, but what conſiſts in waiting for their turn to ſpeak, and is much influenced by a low pleaſure they take in elevating their

voices, and reading faſter or louder than their neighbours.

As to the caſe of the people's pronouncing an Audible *Amen* at the concluſion of a Prayer, we judge that action to be agreeable * to primitive pattern, a fit expreſſion of their common conſent, and what cannot poſſibly occaſion the leaſt interruption or confuſion in the public ſervice. In ſinging alſo, the Harmony of time is conſiſtent enough with attention and devotion, while it tends to elevate and enliven the Spirits. But as to a mixed or alternate reading of Prayers or Pſalms, "we muſt confeſs, with an ingenious † Writer, that we are not very fond of it, (though we are more charitable than, with him, to arraign it as unlawful) becauſe it ſeems leſs ſuitable to the gravity and ſolemnity of Chriſtian Worſhip, and brings in a confuſed noiſe in a Chriſtian Aſſembly, too much like that of a *Dover-Court*, where, it is ſaid, all ſpeak and none hear."

It may be further urged, that Free Prayer requires too much attention to allow due ſcope to the affections. But to this let the excellent Biſhop Wilkins anſwer, "that as a man may in his judgment aſſent unto any divine truth delivered in a ſermon which he never heard before, ſo may he

* 1 Cor. xiv. 16. and Dr. Whitby in loc.
† Mr. Boyſe, vol. 2. p. 83.

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join in his affections with any holy deſire in a Prayer which he never heard before. If he, who is the Mouth of the reſt, ſhall, through imprudence, deliver what we cannot approve of, God does not look upon it as our prayer, if our deſires do not ſay Amen to it." The operations of the mind in underſtanding, judging, aſſenting, exerciſing reflection, and the like, are ſooner exerted than deſcribed, and more immediately connected in themſelves than they appear to be from a progreſſive ſurvey or deſcription of them. Free Prayer, in order to its being underſtood, judged of, and anſwered with ſuitable affection, as the Miniſter proceeds in it, requires no ſtretch of faculties beyond what they will very well bear, none beyond what they ſuffer in hearing Sermons, none but what is requiſite to the carrying on common converſation every day of our lives. One would almoſt think, that ſome people looked upon the public prayers, in the ſame light with a Mathematical Lecture, at which a certain propoſition was to be demonſtrated, which would require ſuch a degree of attention to underſtand it, and judge of the ſeveral ſteps and their connection, in order to form the demonſtration, as would make it neceſſary to have them wrote down upon a Paper or Board before their eyes. But if there be a wide difference in the two caſes, (as ſurely there is) if the great truths of Religion expreſſed in

prayer are immediately obvious to all ſerious and ſenſible minds, we muſt ſay with a late * ingenious Writer, that "we, for our parts, cannot ſee the difficulty of a good man's lifting up his heart to God, in holy deſires and affections, *inſtantly* upon its being ſtruck with a pious ſentiment plainly, properly, and feelingly expreſſed; juſt as the darting rays of the Sun both enlighten and warm all at once. The holy affections of a devout Soul may be conceived like the ſtrings of a muſical inſtrument in tune *inſtantaneouſly* to anſwer to the firſt touch of thought." We conclude therefore that they do not ſufficiently attend to the natural quick motion of the thoughts, and the immediate correſpondence there is between thought and affection, attention and devotion, in pious praying ſouls, who ſay that Free Prayer by too much exerciſing the thoughts, hinders the exerciſe of the affections; and we leave it to our Readers to judge, whether indevotion does not more commonly ariſe from too little, than too much thought and attention.

Suppoſe, after all, that there may be ſome given circumſtances, in which the decency of worſhip cannot be ſecured, nor the devotion of worſhippers promoted but by Forms, as in caſe of gene-

* See the Examination of the Preface to the Univerſal Liturgy, 2d Ed. p. 63.

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ral ignorance, ſuch, as that which is ſuppoſed to have prevailed amongſt the inferior Clergy at the Reformation.

Neceſſity, we own, has no law, and where ſuch neceſſity appears as to the matter in queſtion, all pleas of general expediency muſt give way to it. What is generally moſt expedient, is not always practicable. But perhaps the ignorance of that age has been over-magnified with regard to ſuch as fell in with the Reformation, and it was not ſo much on account of the ignorance of Proteſtant Miniſters, as for other obvious reaſons, that Liturgies were preſcribed to ſome Proteſtant Churches. An Univerſal Liturgy was not neceſſary, but in caſe of Univerſal ignorance. A few occaſional Forms, drawn up for and recommended to the uſe of the more ignorant and obſcure Clergy of theſe days, might probably have been a ſufficient relief to the neceſſities of the times, and the free permiſſion to more able and qualified miniſters of uſing their own gifts, would have been a ſpur to many to aim at the ſame qualifications, and the Reformation by that means have been more abundantly promoted *.

Thus

* It may not be improper to take ſome notice here of written Forms of Prayer compoſed by Miniſters themſelves, and variable at diſcretion, as circumſtances and occaſions require. We obſerve with the Author laſt

Thus we have given our Sentiments upon the advantages of Forms, and can find nothing in them

quoted, " that this ſcheme of Devotion is a very different thing from a public ſtated Form." It is one way of exerciſing the gift of Prayer, and has the ſame advantages with Liturgies with reſpect to the Article of Decency, and is not in its own nature liable to thoſe inconveniencies of Liturgies we ſhall hereafter mention, as being unfriendly to Religious Liberty, or flattening the People's attention and devotion by a perpetual ſameneſs. Our main objection to it, is, that it tends to bring another more advantageous way of exerciſing the ſame gift of Prayer into diſuſe, and to occaſion a neglect of cultivating it both in Miniſters and People, and particularly to diminiſh or deſtroy that aptneſs to pray with ſuitableneſs to particular private circumſtances, which is both an ornament and advantage to the Miniſterial Profeſſion. But it may be aſked, May not Miniſters uſe written notes in Prayer as well as Preaching? We anſwer, 1ſt. That it is an apt means of engaging attention and exciting affection in moſt people, for miniſters to preach without notes, or make little uſe of them, and is therefore a deſirable attainment, though difficult to be reached with advantage. Now if we cannot attain *all we would*, we ſhould labour to attain *all we can*; and if we cannot preach without notes, at leaſt endeavour to pray without them. For, 2dly. It is much eaſier to pray than preach without notes, as will appear to any one, who conſiders, that Sermons ſhould enter more deeply into particular ſubjects than Prayer, and require more of the Logician, Orator, Critic, and Divine, to define, arrange, explain, argue, enforce and apply. A common Chriſtian may attain a good ability in the one, a Learned Divine may fall ſhort of a good ability in the other. 3dly. Miniſters have their conſtant daily calls to prayer, and daily experience may help to perfect their faculty for it, but they are comparatively

ſeldom

them to recommend them to general uſe in preference to Free Prayer. But before we diſmiſs this head, we judge it not improper to attend a little to a popular argument for Forms, adopted by a celebrated * Writer, which repreſents it as our duty to uſe Forms, and does not therefore ſo properly fall under the head of *advantages*. Having obſerved, that we muſt make uſe of words in prayer, he ſays, "it cannot be denied, that we ought to uſe the beſt and propereſt we can: This cannot be done in extemporaneous effuſions, and therefore there muſt be Forms premeditated, the beſt that we are capable of making or procuring, if we would worſhip God to the beſt of our capacity." Here we would aſk, What is meant by the beſt and propereſt words? Surely not the fineſt and moſt elegant in themſelves, but the moſt fit and proper for the exerciſe in hand. It would certainly be no recommendation of a Beggar, that might come to our door for an alms, that he brought with him the beſt Form of Begging, that he could poſſibly get, and addreſſed us in high

ſeldom called to preach, and may therefore want greater helps in that exerciſe. 4thly, The Spirit's aſſiſtance is more fully promiſed, and probably extends further in prayer than other duties, and why not to ſtrengthen the faculties as well as enliven the affections of ſerious humble Chriſtians and Chriſtian Miniſters?

* Woollaſton's Religion of Nature, §. 5. p. 124.

ſtrains

ſtrains of Rhetoric. He is moſt likely to ſucceed in ſuch a caſe, who tells his tale as well as he can, and appears to uſe no words, but what he underſtands, and to expreſs no paſſions but what he feels.

Let as attend to what the ſaid Writer obſerves but a few lines before, concerning the uſe of words in Prayer. "It is not, ſays he, upon God's account that we ſpeak, ſince he would know even our thoughts, but it is upon our own account." Now if it is not on God's account that we ſpeak at all in Prayer, it is not on his account that we bring with us the beſt and propereſt words, but on our own account. If we make conſcience of not degrading God in our thoughts, (as all truly pious perſons do) it is on our own account that we muſt beware of uſing any words in our Prayers that would leſſen our veneration of the Divine Majeſty, but with this caution obſerved, the experience of *many* determines thoſe words to be beſt and propereſt on their own account (becauſe they beſt fix their attention, and raiſe their devotion) which are the free expreſſions of the ſentiments of the heart, uttered by their own mouths, or the mouth of him, who conducts the ſocial devotions.

"He ſpeaks elegantly enough, that ſpeaks but "*intelligibly*, and *affectionately*. And when we "feel

" feel what we ſay, and ſay that, which makes " others *underſtand* and *ſympathize* with us, that " is the *happineſs of expreſſion*, which beſt an- " ſwers the ends of ſpeech *," and the ends of Prayer.

CHAP. III.

The Diſadvantages of Forms.

THE following diſadvantages of Forms chiefly claim our attention, in conſidering which, we ſhall ſuggeſt the principal arguments in favour of Free Prayer, in like manner, as, under a foregoing head were ſuggeſted the principal arguments againſt it.

1ſt. The uſe of Forms is not ſo ſubſervient to the method of *divine Influence* on the minds of men as Free Prayer. " The moſt conſiderable " and common aſſiſtance in Prayer, which is par- " ticularly attributed to the bleſſed Spirit as a " *Spirit of Prayer*, and may be expected from " him in our day, conſiſts chiefly in this; the " putting our Souls into a praying frame, the " ſtirring up holy motions and breathings after " God, giving ſecret hints of our real wants, and " of arguments and promiſes to plead with God,

* Jenks's Liberty of Prayer, p. 42.

" awaken-

" awakening the graces of love, fear, hope, and " joy, that are ſuited to this Duty, and it is " chiefly on this account, that he is called *a Spi-* " *rit of Grace and Supplication.* When theſe are " raiſed to an high degree, the heart will have a " natural influence upon the invention, the me- " mory, the language, and the voice *." Now, it is not pretended that the Spirit of God will afford no ſuch aſſiſtance, as this, in the uſe of Forms, but it is reaſonably preſumed that pious perſons exerciſing themſelves to and in Free Prayer are (*cæteris paribus*, other circumſtances being equal) more in the way of God's heavenly aid and bleſſing; for if we ſuppoſe the Spirit of God to influence our minds in the uſe of their natural powers, and ſuch means as are proper to exerciſe and improve them in Religion, it muſt be allowed, that Free Prayer, in proportion as it exerciſes theſe powers, and leads to the uſe of thoſe means, has the apteſt tendency to invite and cheriſh the gracious aids and influences, which God has promiſed. What advantage Free Prayer has in theſe reſpects, will appear from what will be further offered, to ſhew that the uſe of Forms is not in its own nature and tendency ſo ſubſervient to a de-

* Dr. Watts's excellent treatiſe, entitled A Guide to Prayer, chap. 4. §. 2.

votional

votional praying frame as Free Prayer, even *ſuppoſing* without granting that a divine influence is out of the queſtion *.

2dly, Set Forms of Prayer are too indulgent to the backwardneſs and remiſſneſs of mankind, in applying their thoughts cloſely to ſubjects of a Religious nature. Miniſters and People, by yielding up themſelves to the ſole conduct of a Form, are eaſily and ſoon tempted to neglect that beſt furniture of the mind, an enlarged acquaintance with practical and experimental Divinity; whereas by labouring to obtain a proper furniture for Free Prayer, they cannot but enlarge their acquaintance with the Devotional part of Scripture, and with ſubjects of a practical and experimental nature. The mind will be opened in larger conceptions, and the heart *(if right with God)* feel

* The controverſy about the Spirit's aſſiſtance in Prayer may be more eaſily adjuſted, ſo far as reſpects the Mode, by conſidering, that the queſtion ſhould not be put,—Whether the Spirit of God aſſiſts thoſe, who uſe forms in a ſerious and conſcientious manner, which none ought to deny; nor whether the Spirit's aſſiſtance be eſſentially connected with the mere ſpeaking the words of Prayer without Book, which none ought to affirm:—But whether Free Prayer or Forms, conſidered as means in order to an end, are better adapted and more ſubſervient to the method of divine influence upon the minds and hearts of men? And ſo the Controverſy reſolves itſelf at laſt into the enquiry touching the greater expediency of the one Mode than the other.

a more lively, affecting impreſſion of things Spiritual, Divine, and Heavenly.

3dly, Set Forms cannot be fully adapted to particular circumſtances and neceſſities, and are no more pertinent to every caſe than *general Remedies to all particular diſeaſes*. It is true, that all caſes, that can occur, may be comprehended under certain general expreſſions, but whenever a particular occaſion demands a ſpecial regard to it in the public Prayers, how flat and cold muſt the ſpirits of men remain under a general hint only—"What "one ſays of counſel to be had from Books, "may be fitly applied to Prayer by Book, that "it is commonly of itſelf ſomething flat and "dead, floating for the moſt part too much in "generalities, and not particular enough for each "ſeveral occaſion *."

Such ſpecial ſins, mercies and wants both of particular perſons and ſocieties may and often do occur, as no human ſagacity can foreſee, much leſs any human Forms provide for in a fitting manner; and yet when they riſe, it may be proper to ſpread them before the Lord in Prayer. Societies may have both ſins and mercies in ſome degree peculiar to themſelves, on account of their general ſituation, trade, wealth or poverty, and theſe may require a more than general acknowledgement.

* Biſhop Wilkins on the Gift of Prayer.

Theſe

Theſe ſins and mercies may not always prevail in the ſame degree in the ſame ſociety, and may therefore be properly inſiſted on in a more copious or ſparing manner. What can general Forms do towards entering into ſuch particular caſes, and the ſpecial circumſtances that attend them? and yet a decent expatiating upon ſuch things, does often conſtitute the moſt affecting part of Prayer. It comes cloſe to the conditions of perſons, founds an echo to the reflections of the pious and thoughtful worſhippers, makes its way more directly to the hearts of all, and points like a finger to thoſe objects, which many might otherwiſe over-look, or take but a ſlight view of amidſt a variety of others. Juſt as in viewing a curious Landſcape, it is proper, not only to take a general ſurvey of the variegated ſcene, but both pleaſing and uſeful to have thoſe objects pointed out to us, and our attention drawn to thoſe parts, which are moſt immediately worthy of our notice.

4thly, Set Forms have a tedious and dulling ſameneſs and uniformity in them, and do not ſo powerfully excite and engage the attention of the mind, in the performance of the duty as Free Prayer. Such is the conſtitution of our nature, that change and variety do generally more attract our attention, and impreſs our minds, than the more abſtract internal excellencies of things. Not only the moſt valuable and important, but the

the moſt ſtriking things in *nature*, by being daily and conſtantly repeated, make a much fainter impreſſion, than comparatively trifling incidents of more uncommon occurrence. Thus a ſhadow eclipſing the ſun, draws up a greater number of admiring eyes towards it, than that glorious Luminary himſelf, when *he cometh out of his chamber* in the Eaſt, *and rejoiceth as a ſtrong man to run a race.* If there be nothing in *nature* originally deſigned or given in vain, ſurely the innate paſſion for novelty and variety muſt have its proper and reaſonable uſe, even in Religion, while it is the part of Chriſtian prudence to guard againſt the hurtful abuſe and criminal exceſs; and it may be juſtly alledged as one inconvenience of Forms, that the conſtant uſe of the ſame words in Prayer, offers too much violence to this natural paſſion, and brings on a dulneſs of attention and flatneſs of ſpirit in men's devotions. "And tho' perhaps "ſome very devout perſons may avoid this incon-"venience of conſtant public Forms, yet it ſeems "incurable in the generality of the people, whoſe "caſe muſt be chiefly conſidered, when we con-"ſult their edification in determining the parti-"cular modes of worſhip *."

5thly, In the uſe of Forms there is great danger of men's taking up with a mere Form of Godli-

* Vide Boyſe's Works, Vol. 2. p. 87.

neſs,

neſs, and neglecting the power thereof. This is not preſumed to be a neceſſary and unavoidable conſequence, for it is too evident from fact and experience, that a lifeleſs form of Godlineſs may and often will inſinuate itſelf, into every Mode and Method of Devotion, but (the nature of Man conſidered) it ſeems more likely to find an eaſy entrance into that Mode, which does not require ſo ſerious and intenſe an application of the Mind in order to the performance of it, or in order to the joining in it. "There is indeed, ſays a pious "Biſhop, that inconvenience obſervable in the "much uſe of Forms, and leaning on them, that "they eaſily turn to coldneſs and formality *." The Doctrine of the Opus Operatum in Popery, or of the efficacy of the mere outward action and performance in Religion, to the obtaining the divine acceptance, without regard had to the inward

* See Biſhop Leighton on the Lord's Prayer, p. 56. The good Biſhop indeed adds, "And yet to ſpeak the "truth of this, it is rather imputable to our dullneſs "and want of affection in ſpiritual things, than to the "Forms of Prayer that are uſed." Now, though we can allow, that the connection between Forms and Formality ariſes not from the nature of Forms abſtractedly conſidered, ſo much as the moral ſtate of mankind in relation to ſpiritual things, yet, a moral indiſpoſition ſuppoſed, (as the Biſhop manifeſtly ſuppoſes) the queſtion ſtill remains, whether Free Prayer or Forms be the moſt likely means to cure it. In the words above quoted, he ſeems plainly to give it againſt the latter.

diſ-

diſpoſition, is but too eaſily imbibed into the *Spirit* of Proteſtants. From an overweening conceit of the excellency of certain Forms, how poſſible, how eaſy is it, to ſlide into an opinion of ſome peculiar virtue and efficacy in the mere ſaying and repeating them, and ſo make Religion conſiſt in a formal round of external devotion.

6thly, The uſe of Forms may proceed by an eaſy and natural gradation to the impoſition of them. The uſe of a particular Form ſuppoſes an eſteem of it, at leaſt, in thoſe who firſt uſe it. Time may raiſe that eſteem in them or others, into a conceit of its being a perfect model. A conceit of its perfection, will be apt to produce a contempt of thoſe, who do not receive it, and it is great odds, but as this humour gains ground, it will repreſent other men's devotions as abſurd, prepoſterous and aſſuming, and why not, if power be at hand, dictate the impoſition of its darling Form, as neceſſary to piety and true Religion, to Chriſtian unity, and the peace of the Church; or at leaſt prompt to a denial of the public countenance and encouragement to thoſe, who do not uſe it. If this Form be very faulty and imperfect, the hardſhip of impoſition is the more grievous, and their ſubmiſſion the more wretchedly ſlaviſh, who uſe it contrary to their own convictions. If it be in its kind excellent, it nevertheleſs

leſs reſtrains the gift of many, who would conduct the public devotions in the free exerciſe of their own abilities, with much more life and energy, and in a manner much more agreeable to particular audiences, and more ſuitable to particular circumſtances, than in the uſe of any Form. It lays an unhappy embargo on improvement in devotional exerciſes, and gives the temptation, which few will reſiſt, to aim at no perſonal accompliſhment in the buſineſs of Devotion, better than that of reading Prayers, while nothing better is required.

Thus we have endeavoured to give a fair and impartial view of the diſadvantages of Forms. The ſeveral particulars will probably weigh more or leſs with different perſons, according to the views that cuſtom has rendered moſt familiar to their minds. We ſhall however venture to propoſe the objects that preſent themſelves, as of moſt importance, to our minds.

CHAP.

CHAP. IV.

A Review of the Diſadvantages of Forms.

UPON ſurveying the diſadvantages of Forms enumerated in the foregoing Chapter, we feel ourſelves chiefly affected with conſidering them, as more unfriendly to the cauſe of Religious Liberty and Reformation, and as leſs apt to promote the knowledge and ſenſe of Religion, than Free Prayer.

When we conſider them in the firſt of theſe views, we cannot but think * *his* obſervation well-founded, who, though no advocate for Free Prayer, ſays, "Whatever defects there are, public Forms, not only of Prayers, but of all other things, will have them longer continued, than Extempore ones." When a Liturgy is eſtabliſhed by law, Authority and Cuſtom will concur in giving it a ſanction, and ſtamping a venerable character upon it. When introduced by mutual choice and conſent of Miniſters and their people, Cuſtom alone will conſecrate it in the opinion of the generality. In both caſes, alterations and amendments, however proper and neceſſary, can-

* Dr. Bright's Treatiſe of Prayer quoted by Robinſon againſt Bennet, p. 453.

not

not without much difficulty be effected. Nothing is more natural than for the *multitude* to reverence almoſt every Word and Syllable of a Liturgy as ſacred, which have been applied by them and their Fathers, perhaps for ſeveral paſt generations, to ſo ſacred a buſineſs, as public ſocial Prayer. In this view, Forms once introduced, and afterwards continued amongſt any people, are likely to become the bane of Liberty, and a great, if not inſurmountable bar, in the way of further Reformation, in whatever reſpects it may be wanted; and in the mean time, how unhappy is the caſe of the judicious and conſcientious Clergy and Laity, who ſee the errors and imperfections of the Form they uſe, and yet are reſtrained by Authority, or the Tyrant Cuſtom, from following their better judgment? But is any thing of this ſort incident to Free Prayer? Is the performer hampered with uttering ſentiments he cannot approve, or uſing words and phraſes, which he apprehends not ſuited to convey juſt ſentiments to the minds of others? Has he not the advantage of expreſſing his own ſenſe in his own language? An advantage, obvious to any, who conſider the imperfection of human language, the different Ideas men annex to words and phraſes, and their conſequent freedom or ſcrupuloſity in the uſe of them. In the exerciſe of Free Prayer, how much more eaſy, and leſs likely to offend is

it, for Miniſters to omit, alter, or add, as they judge proper, how much leſs apt to confound or alarm the people, who have been accuſtomed to ſome degree of variety in the prayers of their own Miniſter, and a ſtill greater variety in the gifts of different Miniſters?—But perhaps we are guilty of vain boaſting: For * "though an extemporary Prayer is not impoſed *upon* the Miniſters: What then? It is impoſed *by* the Miniſters, and that's worſe." "Every one of them, "ſays a late flaming writer †, claims an excluſive "privilege of manufacturing our public Prayers, "and aſſumes a right of making us ſay to the "Deity, whatever he thinks fit." For reply, we aſk, Whether Free Prayer does not give the people, what they have an undoubted right to, viz. the benefit of the various gifts and furniture of the Miniſters of the Goſpel? Whether if they chooſe their own Miniſters, they do not in effect chooſe their own Prayers? Whether the Liberty of Miniſters, be not virtually the Liberty of the people, while the latter may at any time remonſtrate againſt any thing conceived to be amiſs in the public ſervice, and the former may at any time add, alter, or omit whatever they are by any means convinced ought to be added, altered, or omitted. If we might be allowed to illuſtrate the

* White's ſecond Letter, p. 44.
† Blackſmith's Letter.

matter

matter by the above low-bred alluſion to a manufactory, we ſhould aſk, Whether any have reaſon to complain of impoſition in trade, when they have a fair chance for buying ſuch wares as they like, and may chooſe the Manufacturers of whom they purchaſe them; whether the privilege of a free and open manufacture be not a common privilege to ſeller and buyer; and whether if the Government ſhould take a Manufactory into its hands, and oblige us by certain penalties to buy its wares, tho' we could pleaſe ourſelves better elſewhere, the impoſition would not be greater and more dangerous, than any private manufacturer could practiſe? But to drop this alluſion, it is no impoſition properly ſo called, for the people to be required to join, as far as they lawfully can, in what the Miniſter delivers in Prayer; this is eſſential to ſocial and joint-Prayer, only with this peculiar advantage in Free Prayer above Forms, that if any thing diſagreeable ſhould occaſionally occur in the former, it is much more eaſily paſſed over, and leſs likely to give diſguſt, than if ſomething equally diſagreeable were conſtantly to recur in the latter *.

We

* It has been ſaid that a Free Prayer is not only impoſed, but is an impoſed Form. But it ſhould be conſidered, that a public Prayer does not become a Form to the people, merely becauſe the words are of the Miniſter's, and not their own preſent invention; but it takes

We can eaſily admit, that the firſt deſign of introducing Forms into Chriſtian Churches might proceed upon good principles, and without any views of impoſition, as an occaſional relief only to the ignorance and inſufficiency of ſome in the Miniſtry: But time and experience proved, that the Forms, which for a while were thought good to be uſed, were at laſt thought proper to be impoſed; and theſe ſhackles being once laid upon the Churches, made way for heavier chains ſtill. "Had the Churches of Chriſt been left unto their "primitive Liberty, under the enjoined duties of "reading and expounding the Scripture, of ſing-"ing Pſalms, &c. all of them with Prayer ac-"cording to the abilities and ſpiritual gifts of "thoſe who did preſide in them, as it is evident "they were for ſome ages, it is impoſſible for any "man to imagine, what evils could have enſued "thereon, that might be of any conſideration,

the nature of a Form, from its being ſtinted and preſcribed to the Miniſter, and conſequently to *them*, ſo that he as *their mouth to God*, ſpeaks only ſuch things, as his Paper or Book preſents to him. We apprehend, in this caſe, that Miniſters and People are to be conſidered in their joint-ſocial capacity, wherein the Miniſter is the repreſentative or Mouth of the Aſſembly to God, conſequently if his Prayer be not a Form in itſelf, i. e. ſtinted and limited to him, it is not ſo to them. It is with him the free exerciſe of a Gift, and they have the benefit of that gift for their edification.

"in

" in compariſon of thoſe enormous miſchiefs, " which followed on the contrary practice."

After all, we doubt not, but many true Friends of Religious Liberty and Reformation, are to be found among the Friends and promoters of Liturgic Worſhip. Should our notions appear to them weak and chimerical, we ſhall conclude this particular with beſpeaking their candor, in alluſion to the words of the Apoſtle, 2 Cor. xi. 1, 2, 3. *Would to God you would bear with us a little in our folly, and indeed bear with us; for,* under an apprehenſion that you miſtake your own deſign, *we are jealous over you with a godly jealouſy,* &c.

Another of thoſe objects which engage our peculiar attention in this diſquiſition, is the promotion and advancement of ſerious practical Religion. We mean not to aſſert, that ſerious practical Religion muſt neceſſarily ſink and periſh under a Form of Prayer. It is ſufficient to our purpoſe, if Free Prayer hath in this reſpect the advantage of Forms; and to be convinced that it has ſo, let us attend a little to the nature and tendency of the mode in itſelf, and to fact and obſervation. As to the former, Free Prayer does in its own nature tend to increaſe the furniture of the mind, and warm the affections of the heart, whether we lead the public devotions in the free way, or join

in them. If we lead the public devotions in this way, all the furniture of the mind is on ſeveral occaſions brought into uſe, and a cloſe attention is neceſſary to its being uſed in a proper and becoming manner. Our minds muſt labour after an acquaintance with ſpiritual and divine things, to lay in furniture for the duty; and when furniſhed in any good meaſure for it, cannot without diligent ſerious attention engage in the performance of it to advantage. If we join the public devotions in this way, we cannot in any meaſure fulfil our duty, without giving a cloſe, ſerious, and fixed attention to *his* words, who is our mouth to God, nor can we, while hanging as it were upon the lips of the Speaker, ſo eaſily let down or relax our attention, as if we were hearing or repeating a Form, the cuſtomarineſs whereof, might diſpoſe us to paſs over it with a ſuperficial glance of thought, juſt as in reviewing a Book, we have often read before, we are prone to run haſtily over the pages, and attend to the general contents of every Chapter only, without that particular attention we might be inclined to beſtow upon it at firſt reading. As without attention, there can be no devotion; ſo that, which is a means to help us in our attention, is certainly ſerviceable to promote our devotion;

and

and that conceived Prayer is a means to engage our attention, we know by our own experience. Now the great things of Religion, which we make the matter of our Prayers, do greatly need to be better attended to, in order to their being more powerfully felt and practically improved; and conſequently that mode of devotion muſt be beſt, and moſt conducive to ſerious practical Religion, which tends moſt to excite and fix the attention. Beſides, are there not charms in novelty and variety, that at once pleaſe and affect the human mind, and ſo far as Free Prayer admits theſe charms, it is much more likely to pleaſe and affect than Forms. Human nature is the ſame in Prayer as in other things; and it is to no purpoſe to ſay, we ſhould never be weary of a good thing, merely becauſe it is not new, or not different from what we had ſeen or known before; for, though we may not be ſo weary as to loath it, if it be good in itſelf, yet it cannot invite or engage the ſame degree of attention, nor yield the ſame reliſh of delight. On the whole, if attention and affection are of any importance in Religion, or are proper to advance and promote it, Free Prayer, as tending to engage them, is of great advantage to the cauſe and intereſt of practical piety in the World.

If the appeal be made to fact and obſervation, it will, we preſume, be eaſily granted that vital practical Religion flouriſhed in the higheſt degree in the firſt period of Chriſtianity, wherein it is almoſt univerſally allowed, that Free Prayer was the ordinary mode of public devotion. If we deſcend to after-ages, wherein Liturgies were introduced into the Chriſtian Church, the ſtate of Religion will be found much changed for the worſe, as the moſt ſuperficial acquaintance with Eccleſiaſtical Hiſtory is ſufficient to evince. And if the uſe of Forms was not the cauſe of that great decay and declenſion in Religion, it ſeems at leaſt to have been the conſequence and effect of it, and as it became the refuge of an ignorant and idle Clergy, gave advantage to the riſe and progreſs of a moſt baneful and corrupt ſuperſtition, that ſoon turned the Chriſtian profeſſion into a mere matter of external ceremony and Form. In ſubſequent ages of the Church, whenever Religion has had any ſort of Revival, it has been moſt naturally attended with the exerciſe, or at leaſt the approbation of Free Prayer, as proper and uſeful to ſuch as were capable of uſing it. It was the opinion of Wickliffe, the firſt and earlieſt Reformer in England, "that to bind men to ſet and preſcript Forms of Prayer doth derogate

gate from that liberty God hath given them *:" which opinion manifeſtly implies, that God has given men in this caſe a liberty, that may be uſed to the moſt valuable purpoſes, and of which therefore they ought not to be abridged.

If we come lower down ſtill, and attend to the ſtate of Religion and the practice of its moſt ſerious and zealous profeſſors, ſince the Reformation, we ſhall find that Free Prayer was the received and approved mode among thoſe, called *puritans*, who were undeniably eminent for their piety. Many of them indeed, for the ſake of peace and union, would have complied with the uſe of a national Liturgy, upon what they eſteemed reaſonable and Scriptural terms; but when theſe could not be obtained, they had no recourſe to Liturgies of their own compoſition, but freely following their own judgment and taſte, they carried on their own worſhip in the way of Free Prayer, as what appeared to them moſt expedient and uſeful.

If we bring the enquiry down to our own times, we find a recent inſtance, to ſhew us how naturally thoſe, who make the greateſt pretenſions to, and profeſſions of piety and ſerious religion, fall in with Free Prayer, viz. in the *Methodiſts*. Their peculiarities do not at all affect the preſent

* Pierce's Vindication. Pt. I. p. 6.

queſtion; but it is to our purpoſe to obſerve, that their pretenſions to ſerious godlineſs have been carried high, and in many inſtances, as we ought in charity to believe and hope, have been ſincere; that the converts to this religious party, have been chiefly of the Church of England, of perſons who had all the prejudices of education to bias them in favour of a Liturgy, and yet have readily fallen in with Free Prayer. Their grand Leaders have been regular Clergymen, perſons, that have always profeſſed a regard for the Church by law eſtabliſhed, and yet from a conſciouſneſs, no doubt, that the national Liturgy, or any other ſet Form, would be too flat and cold for the purpoſe of rouſing people's attention, and warming their affections in Religion, behold, they have choſen Free Prayer for the ordinary mode of devotion in their aſſemblies. Their conduct muſt appear highly abſurd, and even inconſiſtent with their own profeſſed deſign, on any other ſuppoſition, but this, that they are convinced, that Free Prayer is more capable, than Forms, of being adapted to the various conditions and circumſtances of mankind under religious impreſſions; and that others are more likely to feel with them, when they expreſs the immediate ſentiments or feelings of their own minds. It matters not to the caſe in hand, whether their expreſſions of inward feelings carry

an enthuſiaſtical tincture in them or not; becauſe Free Prayer is as ſure a means of bringing others to feel the impreſſions of rational piety, as it is of raiſing them to any enthuſiaſtical raptures. If it tend to affect mankind in any way, it is owing to the wrong management of thoſe that uſe it, that it does not affect them in a right manner.

Before we diſmiſs this head, we beg leave to obſerve, that there is perhaps no better means of promoting Religious knowledge, and a ſerious ſpirit among young people, than their learning to pray without a Form, which they are never likely to do, where Free Prayer has no place in the public ſervice. The very endeavour after this gift, tends to draw the attention to, and fix it upon divine things; and how great a point gained is this, towards forming them to a religious diſpoſition and practice? Should they not be encouraged to obtain this gift, becauſe it is poſſible, that pride may grow up with it in ſome minds? With equal reaſon they ſhould be diſcouraged from cultivating any religious knowledge, becauſe, as the Apoſtle tells us, *Knowledge puffeth up*. What! if the cultivation of this gift do in ſome inſtances iſſue in ſelf-aſſuming pride and conceit, the inſtances are, we believe, far more numerous, in which it is the means of forming young perſons to a ſerious and ſolid religious profeſſion. We ſhall add no more upon this topic, but our hearty wiſh, that

the ſpirit of true, lively, and warm devotion may be diffuſed through all worſhipping aſſemblies of Chriſtians, and that thoſe particularly, who uſe their liberty in Prayer, would labour to derive all the advantages from it, that we think it affords.

Tho' perhaps they are ready to deſpiſe Forms, as crutches, which they do not need, or to reject them, as ſhackles and incumbrances which they cannot endure; yet let *them* remember, how poſſible it is, that many in the uſe of a Form by *them* rejected and deſpiſed, may outſtrip *them* in real piety, yea riſe up in judgment againſt and condem *them*, who, notwithſtanding the boaſted goodneſs of *their way*, fall ſhort of the End; by not improving *their* advantages to thoſe purpoſes of grace and holineſs, which they have the apteſt tendency to promote.

As the foregoing pages were drawn up with a view to the caſe of introducing Liturgies amongſt Diſſenters, we beg leave to cloſe the whole, with addreſſing a few queries to the Miniſters and People of that Denomination.

I. Whether ſerious vital Religion is more likely to flouriſh among Diſſenters by introducing Liturgic worſhip, than in the way of Free Prayer?

II. Whether the Diſſenters of the preſent age have not loſt much of the ſerious ſpirit and character, which is ſo eſſential to the Grace, and ſo help-

helpful to the Gift of Prayer, and therefore ſeek refuge in Forms?

III. Whether the neglect of Family-Religion now too common among them, be not one evidence of the decay of ſerious piety?

IV. Whether Forms did not take place in the Chriſtian Church, after the primitive Spirit was departed from it, and whether they were not followed by numberleſs corruptions?

V. Whether the plainneſs and ſimplicity of Divine worſhip can be long maintained in the univerſal uſe of Forms, or whether various Ceremonies of human device, have not generally gone along with them, or in due time followed, as a proper appendage to them?

VI. Whether the credit of the Miniſtry is likely to be kept up in the uſe of Forms; and whether thoſe who are thought unfit to lead the public devotions without a Form of other men's deviſing, have not loſt much ground in the eſteem of the people?

VII. Whether the old Diſſenters will not dwindle more and more under the uſe of Forms, while the Methodiſts in the uſe of Free Prayer will draw greater numbers from their Congregations, than they have ever yet done?

VIII. Whether a Liturgical worſhip will not diſunite Diſſenters more and more; and as it is morally

morally certain, they will not all join in one Form; whether a variety of Forms will not cauſe odious compariſons, and ſplit them into as many parties as there are different Forms compoſed *in Uſum Londini, Eboraci, Mancunii, Leverpoliæ*, &c. ?

IX. Whether a Diſſenting Liturgy, ſtanding as a rival to that by law eſtabliſhed, will not be more offenſive to their neighbours than Free Prayer, and rather hinder than promote the Coalition of Church and Diſſenters ?

INTRODUCTION

To PART II.

WHOEVER peruſes the former part of this Treatiſe, will eaſily perceive, that we do not ſtand indifferent towards that mode of Prayer which appears attended with ſuch ſuperior advantages as were there enumerated: conſequently that we cannot give in to a late attempt of introducing ſtinted Forms in the room of Free Prayer into the public worſhip of Diſſenters. The attempt itſelf ſomewhat alarms our fears; but it is apprehended cauſes and conſequences do ſo much more. We readily grant the matter in agitation is a mere mode; the outſide garb of piety rather than piety itſelf. Now 'tis the ſpirit of Prayer and ſerious piety rather than this its external garb which we moſt dread the loſs of. And are there no grounds of fear from that quarter? Certainly it might do well for ſome of our Brethren ſoberly to conſider, how far their projected ſcheme of introducing ſtinted forms of public devotion, proceeds

ceeds from a decay of ſerious piety, ſtands connected with it, and may lead to ſtill greater decays, before they carry it into farther execution. We would gladly hope that neither ignorance, nor want of genius, nor even ſloth puts them on this eaſier method of conducting public Prayer. We are rather willing to aſſign all the laudable cauſes for this change that the caſe will admit. But we beg leave to aſk, whether an equal, yea ſuperior number of culpable ones do not lye at the bottom? What if ſome plead baſhfulneſs and modeſt ſelf-diffidence, as a cauſe why they dare not pour out their prayers in the face of a whole Aſſembly, without the aſſiſtance of a Form placed before their eyes; may they not, upon examination, find it more owing to a deficiency in Chriſtian zeal, and to a diſtruſt of God's promiſes, and his Spirit's influences; yea, perhaps to ſome neglect of cultivating the gift and cheriſhing the grace of Prayer in their Families, and private retirements? What if others, weary of the old-faſhioned way of our plain Forefathers, do deſire to exchange it for elegant Forms, as better ſuited to the more refined taſtes, and exacter judgment of the preſent age; yet may not all this be more the effect of a colder heart than better judgment, and of a ſickly taſte to true devotion than of a juſt reliſh for it? Admit that too many of our extempore prayers are

dry

dry and ſpiritleſs, ſcanty and confuſed; yet let it be candidly conſidered, whether this can be juſtly imputed to the natural tendency of Free Prayer, or not rather to the unhappy withdrawment of a ſpirit of prayer and piety from ſome of our worſhipping Aſſemblies?

How far religion in general is upon the decline among us, 'tis hard to ſay. Perhaps religious liberty is better underſtood, and a catholic ſpirit more extenſively cultivated among modern Proteſtant Diſſenters in general, than they uſed to be among their Anceſtors. Yea probably a ſpirit of ſerious piety breathes as ſtrongly and feelingly in ſeveral Diſſenting Congregations, even in our own day, as it generally did among our devout Forefathers; notwithſtanding the preſent ſerene and calm times in which profeſſors meet with more alluring temptations to fall aſleep in carnal ſecurity, and dead-hearted formality, than thoſe did who were ſo often alarmed and kept awake by the perſecuting ſtorms, which toſs'd the ark of God and its afflicted paſſengers in the laſt age.

But after all, we think that perſon a great ſtranger in our Iſrael, who perceives not a general decay of ſerious piety among us, with reſpect to that one branch of it, which immediately refers to our preſent ſubject. In how few houſes doth the daily incenſe of family prayer riſe towards Heaven,

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in compariſon of what it uſed to do in the days of our Fathers! Beſides, they had their Bethels of Prayer and Chriſtian conference, to which numbers reſorted; and in which, Jacob-like, they wreſtled with God, and made ſupplication, ſometimes with cries and tears; without any Monitor except the Spirit of God, without any Prayer-book beſides a devout heart. But of late years have not theſe aſſociations for Prayer been totally laid aſide in many Diſſenting Congregations thro' the land. Wou'd to God this viſible declenſion in reſpect of this duty had ſpread only thus far! But has not the infection reached even the pulpit? In ſuch a dull, formal, dry and irreverent manner has public Prayer been conducted in ſeveral of our worſhipping Aſſemblies, that many ſerious Chriſtians have been ready to cry out, "Ichabod, "the glory is departed." 1 Sam. iv. 22 *.

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* Although it be mournful to conſider how much the ſpirit and gift of Prayer have been upon the decline among us of late years; yet we apprehend it may truly be ſaid of many hundreds of Diſſenters, both Miniſters and private Chriſtians, in our own nation and age, that they poſſeſs this heavenly gift in as eminent a degree as their pious Fathers ever did. For if the Divine Spirit does not impart to them ſuch powerful irradiations and ſtrong conſolations in Prayer as enabled their afflicted Foreſathers to wreſtle with God by ſtrong cries and tears, there was a peculiar cauſe for it, which we are far from wiſhing to be repeated in our own peaceful age. However,

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Two or three Prayers, committed to memory, or read out of a paper, have been almoſt the whole entertainment which ſome Congregations have had for ſeveral years, out of that inexhauſtible ſtore-houſe of materials for Prayer that the large field of Scripture and a multitude of inſtructive events, which Divine Providence and the changing frames of the heart are giving daily birth to, do furniſh out. This lame manner of conducting public Prayer is become ſo inſipid to ſome, and ſo common to others, that another deſign is now formed; a deſign to do what? To recover that primitive ſpirit of ſerious piety and of fervent Free Prayer, which has prevailed in every period of the Chriſtian Church when religion was either in its full bloom, or upon a revival after a long and frozen winter of declenſion? This indeed would have been laudable: this would have been curing the diſtemper at the root. But inſtead of reſtoring the lame and diſtempered part to its former ſoundneſs, nothing is thought on by ſome but crutches, viz. a well compoſed elegant Liturgy. But for our own parts, we are much miſtaken in our judgment of facts, and of human na-

as much as the pious Miniſters of our day fall ſhort of their Predeceſſors with reſpect to a melting frame in Prayer; ſo much do they in our opinion go beyond them in ſome other excellencies attending this exerciſe.

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ture, if Forms of Prayer be the apteſt means of baniſhing dead-hearted formality from the houſe of God. Poſſibly indeed when a Liturgy makes its firſt appearance in our holy Aſſemblies, adorned with the ſtrongeſt colourings of art, it may be paſſionately admired for a while: but after our Congregations have breathed upon it a few years, and when attention ſlackens, and affection fails for want of novelty and variety to excite and engage them; will it not wither in their eſteem? will it not loſe its charms, and ſhare the fate of all things beneath the ſun, eſpecially of all things produced by the art of man, namely to become leſs affecting the more common and cuſtomary that it grows? Beſides, when Forms have been thus introduced into the Houſe of God, may they not prove the unhappy occaſion of ſpreading a mere form of godlineſs into the family and cloſet too? For if Forms are deemed ſo neceſſary for the Miniſter, the man of learning; much more for the illiterate private Chriſtian, both in his family and in ſecret. Now when Forms, provided to the hand, have ſhut out Free Prayer both from the pulpit, family, and cloſet, will not this leſſen the people's dependence upon the aſſiſting Spirit of God in Prayer, and conſequently leſſen their dutiful carriage to him in common life? Beſides, when perſons, thus attached to Forms, do fall under peculiar convictions of ſin, will they be ſo inclin-

inclinable to pour out their deſires in Prayer according to their preſent feelings? or will there be ſuch earneſt pleadings with God in Prayer under thoſe new riſen extraordinary temptations or providences, which no pre-compoſed Forms have made any proviſion for? To conclude:

Living Religion is the true glory of a worſhipping Aſſembly. If this be abſent, Prayer, under every mode, is but an empty ſound; the moſt decent externals of worſhip, only a kind of hypocritical paint; and the moſt ſumptuous ornaments of ſacred Edifices, how commendable ſoever in themſelves, are little better than the extravagancies of a ſpendthrift. May theſe conſiderations perſuade all of every denomination, who deſire farther improvements in public worſhip, to exert their utmoſt endeavours towards recovering the ſpirit of primitive piety! This regained, will give ſuch zeal and eloquence to the Speaker, and ſuch taſte and feeling to the Hearer, as no human art or new inventions of men can equal. In a word, this will add an excellency and ornament to our religious Aſſemblies and the public worſhip thereof, far ſuperior to all the ſacrifices that ſmoaked on the Levitical altar, to all the fragrant incenſe that aſcended from Aaron's golden cenſer; yea, to all the oriental gold, cedar-wood, and precious

ſtone;

ſtones, which enriched and beautified Solomon's magnificent temple.

N. B. Our deſign in inſiſting thus largely upon this laſt topic, is to obviate any undue ſtreſs that our Readers might otherwiſe lay, on thoſe externals of public worſhip, which are ſo earneſtly pleaded for in ſome following pages.

PUBLIC PRAYER.

PART II.

CHAP. I.

The little Reverence appearing in many who join in public Free-Prayer frankly owned, and cenſured.

MAN is a Being who has the moſt important Intereſts to ſecure of any Creature on Earth, Religion the moſt important Buſineſs of Man from its reference to that End, and Prayer the moſt ſerious and ſolemn thing in Religion. In this ſolemn exerciſe mortal creatures make a nearer and more direct approach to the throne of the all glorious King of Heaven, than in any other religious exerciſe whatever.

In all other ſervices carried on in the Houſe of God, whether Pſalmody, Sacraments, or the Word preached, we only venture to thiuk ſilently of God, to hear of Him, or at moſt to ſpeak of Him; but in Prayer we do more, we actually ſpeak *to* him.

And

And is Prayer indeed ſuch a ſerious, ſolemn, and momentous branch of religion? and doth it concern us all? how then can we forbear to urge upon our conſciences that important inquiry, which Balak king of Moab once made, "Wherewith ſhall I come before the Lord, and bow myſelf before the high God? Micah, vi. 6. With what a ſerious mind! With what a reverent behaviour! In the former part of this Treatiſe it hath been ſhewn, what a ſingular tendency well-conducted Free Prayer hath to cheriſh a devout frame of mind. And ſuch a natural connection is there between the frame of the mind, and the mien and behaviour of the body; that the devotion of the former ſhould, one would think, almoſt neceſſarily extend its happy influence to the latter. Conſequently they who worſhip God by Free Prayer, may reaſonably be expected to ſhew great reverence in their external deportment in the houſe of Prayer. But is this always the caſe? Alas! if the appeal be made to fact, we fear it will be found very often the reverſe *. That ir-

* How a *moral cauſe* or inſtrument may have a natural tendency to produce a certain effect, and yet fail of producing it after all; ſee accounted for, and the fact illuſtrated by the caſe of hearing good Sermons unprofitably, in *An Examination* of the *Preface* to a new plan of Chriſtian public worſhip called the Chriſtian Common Prayer Book, or Univerſal Liturgy, p. 70, 71.

reverent

reverent behaviour and negligent air which ſits on the countenances of many perſons in Diſſenting Congregations, who worſhip God by Free Prayer, is too viſible not to be obſerved, too mournful not to be lamented. We ſhall not indeed take our eſtimate in this caſe, from the irreverent demeanour of that profane tribe of ſinners, who ſcruple not to laugh and divert themſelves amidſt the ſolemn exerciſes of public Prayer; who are at leiſure to pay compliments to perſons entering their pews, or to whiſper ſomething into the ear of thoſe who ſtand next them. For as perſons of this ſorry claſs, have no ſerious ſenſe of Religion upon their minds, they will betray irreverence, levity, and a ludicrous carriage in any worſhipping aſſembly whatever; let the mode of public Prayer be ever ſo ſolemn. But we refer to many who demean themſelves with gravity in common life, are regular in their converſation, and who ſeem to have ſome tincture of Religion; and yet their behaviour in public worſhip is ſo indevout and irreverent, that they perhaps give not one ſingle indication of their hearts being engaged in the duty of Prayer, or affected by it.

How many may be ſeen indulging the moſt lazy and lolling poſture of body that can be, except that of ſitting. Nay do not ſome through errant ſloth or careleſsneſs, indulge even this irreverent

poſture to their own ſhame, and the great ſcandal and grief of every devout worſhipper that's near them. When their legs are a little tired, or themſelves are under a ſmall bodily indiſpoſition, they rather chooſe to ſit in public Prayer, and perhaps fall aſleep, than to kneel; though this might equally eaſe them. But as this irreverent poſture in public Prayer, is rarely practiſed by that body of Diſſenters which we are moſt acquainted with, we paſs it over, and proceed to ſome more common caſes, which diſcover an aſtoniſhing irreverence and careleſsneſs in this moſt ſolemn exerciſe, that a creature can poſſibly engage in on this ſide heaven. Do not ſome ſpend the time of Prayer in ſurveying their own clothes, or adjuſting them; others in viewing the dreſs of thoſe who ſtand in ſome neighbouring pew? Some in regaling themſelves with noſegays, or with a well known powder, to which they are ſo enſlaved, that they cannot, or rather will not refrain from this indulgence, even for that ſhort ſpace of time, when they ſhould be paying their moſt ſolemn addreſſes to their all glorious Creator? Others perhaps are this while caſting their eyes round the aſſembly in order to ſpy who is there. All this, or ſomething like it, is the carriage not merely of the profane herd of mankind, but of too many who make a conſiderable profeſſion of re-

religion among Diſſenters, and are regular and reſpectable in common life. And now doth not ſuch a behaviour in divine worſhip appear very unſeemly and miſbecoming? If it does not, we fear it is owing to the cuſtomarineſs of it *. But transfer ſuch a carriage as this to him who is the common mouth of a praying aſſembly; and conſider how it would appear in him. If the Miniſter makes uſe of any irreverent poſture and geſtures; or ſtares about him in Prayer; how ſoon do the congregation mark it, and how juſtly do they condemn it? Not conſidering that the ſame degree of reverence is required in them as in him; if they pray at ſuch a time, as well as he; which they undoubtedly ſhould do.

* N. B. While we thus minutely animadvert upon and cenſure theſe faults of others, are we not in danger of falling under cenſure ourſelves? So extremely delicate is the taſte of the preſent over-polite age, that even the Chriſtian profeſſor, who imagines he abhors the vices and follies of the times, will as much bluſh, and be in as great pain for the Writer or Preacher, who ſtoops to a circumſtantial detail of the faults he is reproving; as he would perhaps be to ſee them actually committed. This misjudged and miſplaced delicacy, both of modern Writers and Readers, we take to be an inconceivable bar to the reformation of the preſent generation. Moſt certainly faults ſhould be as freely, particularly, and unreſervedly reprehended, as they were committed. Beſides, general and diſtant declamations, ſeldom ſtrike the conſcience with ſuch conviction, as particular repreſentations do.

Will any now object, that we have carried the foregoing unpleaſing accuſation too far? We appeal to matter of fact; we appeal alſo to the teſtimony of perſons of peculiar note, even among Diſſenters themſelves; who, though celebrated both for their great judgment and candor, have carried this article of accuſation as high as we have done. Attend to the following declaration of that ſolid and excellent Divine Mr. Bennet. "There is nothing that we are more generally defective in, than in performing this part of religious worſhip. That careleſs air which ſits upon the face of a congregation when engaged in public Prayer, ſhews how little they know of this matter, and how few ſeriouſly join in public and ſolemn Prayer, &c. I muſt profeſs to you, ſhould the enemies of our way of worſhip be preſent to obſerve us, there is nothing I ſhould be ſo much aſhamed of, as our exceeding careleſs, irreverent, indevout manner of joining in public Prayer *." The ingenious Dr. Fordyce makes the like declaration, concerning his own countrymen in the Church of Scotland. "When the Miniſter of God hath been addreſſing him in the name, and as the mouth of the people, the greateſt part of them ſeem to be doing any thing, rather than joining in the ſolemn ſervice; in reality

* See his Sermon upon joining in public Prayer.

there

there is no exerciſe of a ſpiritual nature, which the generality ſeem to regard ſo little, or to attend to ſo liſtleſsly. Yea their inſenſibility, their irreverence in this reſpect, are, from the whole of their deportment, moſt ſhamefully diſtinguiſhable and flagrant *."

And now, Reader, do any of theſe deſcriptions ſet forth your own caſe? If they do, pauſe a few minutes, and conſider whether ſuch a behaviour in Prayer can conſiſt with a ſpiritual frame of mind. If it can, (though we greatly queſtion it,) yet ſurely an inward ſpiritual frame of mind is very ill expreſſed by ſuch an irreverent outward behaviour. For let us ſeriouſly aſk, whether ſuch a demeanour becomes a Congregation, who profeſs to be addreſſing the all glorious Jehovah in one of the moſt ſolemn exerciſes, that can poſſibly be carried on upon earth; an exerciſe in which every thing trifling, indecent, and indevout ſhould be removed as far from us, as the Eaſt is from the Weſt? If ſuch a behaviour, in Divine worſhip, as has been deſcribed, becomes any particular member of a Congregation; it muſt equally become them all. Suppoſe then for argument's ſake, that a whole Congregation of

* Edification by public Inſtitutions.

Diſſenters ſhould worſhip God in the ſame careleſs, indevout and irreverent manner, and that a ſtranger to their mode of worſhip ſhould come into that aſſembly at the time of public Prayer, could he by any thing he ſaw in the behaviour of ſuch an aſſembly, underſtand what they were about? Muſt not the Miniſter's work in the pulpit, be the only thing that could certify him, that ſuch an aſſembly had any thing of a ſerious religious nature in hand, at that particular time? And could even that certify a by-ſtander, that the Miniſter and congregation were carrying on the ſame ſort of exerciſe.

CHAP

CHAP. II.

The Cauſes of Irreverence and apparent Indevotion in thoſe who join in public Free Prayer enquired into.

IF any bigotted Diſſenter hath happened to caſt his eyes upon a few paragraphs in the foregoing Section, we expect no milder treatment from ſuch a warm brother, than Joſeph once gave his poor brethren: for methinks, we hear ſuch keen language as this drop from his lips. "*By the life of Pharaoh this is ſome ſpy; to diſcover the nakedneſs of* our worſhip *he is certainly come.*" But peace, good brother, think not that we have any bad deſigns upon you, or upon thoſe for whoſe reputation you are zealouſly concerned. We mention the aforeſaid blemiſhes, not ſo much with a deſign to expoſe, as to reform them; as you will hereafter perceive. But at preſent we muſt adhere to our general plan. Having obſerved with concern, how much irreverence appears in many perſons who attend public worſhip, in thoſe congregations where free extempore Prayer is uſed, we next proceed to point out the cauſes thereof. Now the primary ſource of all, is certainly ſome internal defect of ſerious piety, and of the devotion of the heart. No doubt, if the ſpirit of devotion ope-

rated more ſtrongly, it would almoſt neceſſarily influence the outward man to anſwerable reverence. But to proceed to ſome more particular cauſes of the fault here complained of.

1ſt. Too low an eſteem of public Prayer, may be one cauſe of their negligent behaviour. If ſome in another communion make too light an account of the word preached; if they heſitate not to declare that they underſtand their duty ſufficiently well of themſelves; and that their only end in going to Church is to ſay their Prayers: does not the language of ſome in our own communion, import that they make as light an account of public Prayer, in compariſon of hearing a good Sermon? If we muſt interpret the meaning of their hearts, by the words of their lips, one would be ready to imagine that their chief, if not only errand to the Houſe of God, is to hear ſuch a one preach. Now to perſons running into the former extreme, we earneſtly recommend that awful ſaying in Proverbs xxviii. 9. "*He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his Prayer ſhall be an abomination.*" As to others who ſlide into the latter extreme, we only aſk them: Why is the Houſe of God called *an Houſe of Prayer* (Matt. xxi. 13.) if Prayer is not to be regarded and reverenced, as one principal part of the ſervice to be carried on in it?

2dly.

2dly. Ignorance of the nature of public Prayer, may be another cauſe of an irreverent behaviour in ſome who ſhould join therein. As they who pray by a Liturgy, are in ſome danger of taking up with the lip-labor of *reading Prayers*, inſtead of praying: ſo others who join in free Prayer, are in equal danger of contenting themſelves with hearing the common ſpeaker pray, inſtead of praying themſelves. Do not ſome ignorant people vainly imagine that it is not themſelves who are to pray at ſuch a time, no more than they are to preach the other part of the time; but that it is the Miniſter only who prays, not *with* but only *for* them? Now what wonder is it, if theſe miſtaken perſons, who conſider themſelves as no more than ear witneſſes of the Miniſter praying, do not make conſcience of ſeeking a devout frame of mind, or of putting their bodies into a devout poſture. What need either of a praying frame, or praying poſture, when, as they imagine, themſelves have no praying work in hand?—Again, ſome it is to be feared, liſten to the Miniſter's Prayer, juſt as they liſten to his Sermon; viz. in order to underſtand and remember it only. Though indeed there is as wide a difference between praying; and only hearing, underſtanding,

and following a Prayer, as between hearing of a feaſt, and actual feaſting *.

3dly. A miſtaken notion that the devotion of the heart, is in a manner the only thing to be regarded even in public Prayer, is another cauſe of irreverence in ſome who join in that exerciſe. The poſture of the body in Prayer, and even the compoſure of the countenance are in the eſtimation of ſome, little more to be regarded, than thoſe old teſtament ceremonies which the ſpiritual new-teſtament diſpenſation has wholly aboliſhed. And have not many of our moſt ſerious Diſſenting Miniſters done more towards helping forward this miſtaken notion, than rectifying it, by the ſtrain of their pulpit diſcourſes? Have they not puſhed the important point of *worſhipping God in Spirit*, ſo very far, and with ſo little reſerve, that many of their people have made very little account of common decency and reverence in Divine worſhip? Indeed charity inclines us to hope that a very laudable motive hath given their Sermons ſuch a ſtrong bent this way; that is a well-

* Joining in public Prayer, being liable to ſo many capital miſtakes, we judge it highly expedient that our Miniſters acquaint their Hearers oftener with the nature and method of joining in that exerciſe. Their doing this too ſparingly, may poſſibly be one cauſe of the default complained of in this and the foregoing Chapter.

meant

meant deſign of leading their hearers into a more deep and thorough acquaintance with thoſe internal vital parts of religion, which are chiefly to be regarded. Perhaps too their diſcourſes have been the more levelled this way, when they have obſerved ſo many ſuperſtitious ignorant people, laying ſuch undue ſtreſs on the outſide ceremonial parts of public worſhip. But if many of another communion have run into this extreme, is it not too apparent that ſeveral Diſſenters have fallen into the oppoſite one, of making too little account of the externals in public worſhip? Alas how hard a matter is it for ſuch a ſhort-ſighted creature as man, ſo to eye diſtant extremes at the ſame time, as not to verge too much towards either of them; but to ſtand at a due diſtance from both? And an extreme it certainly is, to make public worſhip either all ſoul, and no body; or all body, and no ſoul. Undoubtedly the devotion of the heart is the ſoul of public, as well as of ſecret Prayer. But in this world, public Prayer doth as much need a body as our ſouls do; and this body of public worſhip ought to be decently clothed; not indeed trimmed up in patch and paint, like a lewd harlot; but dreſſed like a chaſte virgin, in modeſt comely apparel wholly out of the Scripture ward-robe. And as the neceſſary effect of this, and indeed nearly allied to it, we may add,

4thly. Another cauſe of that irreverent unguarded behaviour, which too much prevails among diſſenting Congregations in God's Houſe of Prayer, is a certain rooted averſion to pomp and ceremony carried to an extreme. As ſome are moſt ſtrongly inclined to ceremony and ſhew in civil matters, and others as ſtrongly averſe thereto; ſo is it in religious concerns: Now it is the great fault of many, that they make their own inclinations, rather than Scripture and the nature of things, their rule and meaſure with reſpect to modes of worſhip. Hence ſome have ſuch a peculiar fondneſs for pomp and ceremony in Divine worſhip as to puſh the point not only farther than the goſpel rule, but beyond the rules of their own Church *. Again it is the like inbred diſpoſition, though working a contrary way, which inclines many Diſſenters to run into the oppoſite extreme, of ſtripping public worſhip too much of thoſe comely ornaments, which both reaſon and ſcripture beſtow on it; and which the conſtitution of nonconforming Churches doth not deny to it: Such as concluding Prayer with a vocal Amen, and uſing a worſhipping poſture in ſinging †; beſides

* In this number may be reckoned bowing and worſhipping towards the Eaſt: The alternate reciting of the Pſalms by Miniſters and People: Alſo inſtrumental muſic.

† Praiſing God by Pſalmody being as much an act of Divine worſhip as the thankſgiving part of Prayer, (not to ſay

ſides putting the body into the moſt becoming Scripture-poſture in time of Prayer. Would people forbear to conſult their own fancies and inclinations, and make the new teſtament and ſober reaſon their ſtandard, public worſhip would neither appear indecently rude or naked on the one hand, nor vainly gaudy and oſtentatious on the other.

5thly, That very lame and unedifying manner in which public Prayer is ſometimes conducted, is another unhappy cauſe of irreverence and negligence in thoſe who pretend to join in that holy exerciſe. If the Prayer of him who is the common mouth of a Congregation, is either ſo bombaſt, philoſophical or obſcure, as to ſoar above the capacities of the people; or if on the other hand, 'tis ſo mean and trifling as to ſink far below their taſte; all this will ſpread a careleſs, negligent air, or ſomething worſe over a worſhipping aſſembly.

ſay how many of the pſalms are real Prayers,) doth as much require a worſhipping poſture; not indeed a *kneeling* poſture, but the elevated one of *ſtanding*; as better adapted to ſuch an elevated angelic exerciſe. What therefore beſides tyrant-cuſtom can plead for the irreverent poſture of *ſitting* in this part of Divine worſhip; ſeeing it is repugnant to the very nature of the exerciſe; and has not one ſcripture precept to authorize it: whereas ſtanding hath ſeveral. See 2 Chron. v. 12. and Chap. xxix. 26, 27, 28? Yea they were expreſly commanded to ſtand in time of ſinging. 1 Chron. xxiii. 30.

Again,

Again, if the Leader of public Prayer is very dull and formal in his part of the work, the Congregation will probably be ſo in theirs: or if he uſes aukward tones, or ridiculous geſtures in that grave exerciſe, a ſerious and ſolemn air can hardly be expected to ſit upon the countenances of all, or the greater part of his fellow worſhippers.

CHAP. III.

A reverent Behaviour in Public Prayer recommended and enforced.

SO extremely ignorant or inſenſible are many of the pure and ſpiritual nature of God, and of the ſpirituality of Goſpel-worſhip, that they take up entirely with that bodily exerciſe, which, as the Apoſtle ſpeaks, profiteth little, 1 Tim. iv. 8. Others run into the oppoſite extreme of confining all worſhip to the heart; and becauſe God is a Spirit, they worſhip Him as if themſelves were ſpirits too, and had nothing to do with the body. But certainly as the body is to ſhare with the ſoul in the happineſs of Heaven, ſo ſhould it ſhare with it in the worſhip of God on earth. Beſides, as great a ſtreſs as the New Teſtament lays upon internal ſpiritual worſhip, it notwithſtanding gives ſuch injunctions as do fairly imply, that the body is to be engaged in God's ſervice too. Does not the

the Apoſtle beſeech us, in a very earneſt manner, *by the mercies of God to preſent* our *bodies a living ſacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which is* our *reaſonable ſervice*, Rom. xii. 1. Again, in the 6th chapter of the very next Epiſtle and 20th verſe, the ſame Apoſtle exhorts us to *glorify God in our body*, as well as *in* our *ſpirit, which are God's*. Now if the body as well as ſoul is to act its part in public worſhip, it ſhould undoubtedly be ſuch a reverent part as comports with the nature of that ſolemn and heavenly exerciſe. Certainly no irreverent indolent poſture of body, nor light careleſs air ſhould accompany us to the throne of grace, when we addreſs that glorious King of Heaven, before whom, as the Scripture ſpeaks, the ſeraphim veil their faces, and the elders proſtrate themſelves, and caſt their crowns at his feet; eſpecially ſeeing we approach this glorious King of heaven and earth, in the character of indigent beggars, imploring an alms; of guilty condemned criminals crying for mercy, and begging for their lives; yea for a ſhare in eternal life. What reverent geſtures do we find ſaints in Scripture uſing, when engaged in this ſolemn exerciſe? ſome ſtanding with uplifted hands ſpread towards heaven, 1 Kings viii. 22. others falling upon their knees; and ſome falling proſtrate with their faces upon the ground, Joſh. v. 14. chap. vii. 6. and Matth. xxvi. 39. Will any after all this object that the poſture

ture of the body in public Prayer ſignifies nothing, if the heart be but in a right frame; *for God looks at the heart?* 'Tis anſwered, this is not only contrary to expreſs texts of ſcripture above quoted, but to the very deſign of public worſhip, which is to glorify God publicly. But how can thoſe be ſaid to glorify God publicly in divine worſhip, who make no part of their devout behaviour public, but conceal it all within the ſecret chambers of their hearts. Believe it, let the inward frame be ever ſo ſpiritual, and the place of worſhip ever ſo ſacred, as well as public, it cannot juſtly be termed public devotion, but public profaneneſs; if nothing but irreverence and negligence appear in the outward man. The forementioned objection doth alſo proceed upon a wrong ſuppoſition; namely, that we worſhip God in public ſolely for our own benefit, and not for the public benefit and edification of others. This, I ſay, is a miſtake; for certainly profeſſors of religion ſhould aſſemble together, not only with a view of warming their own hearts by devotion, but alſo of enkindling and increaſing a general flame of devotion; which becomes the greater, when it receives additions from ſeveral quarters, like a number of burning coals laid together, whereby the common heat and flame are increaſed. But if they were each incloſed within an equal number of hollow iron globes, and ſo placed together, this would defeat

defeat the great end and deſign of their being brought together. Doubtleſs the chief deſign of public worſhip is, to publiſh and ſpread abroad the glory of God among mankind in the world: but when Prayer, that moſt ſolemn part of God's worſhip, is attended with ſo much irreverent behaviour, it ſpreads among mankind an irreverence towards God, and divine things. It cheapens and leſſens the Divine Majeſty in the eye and eſteem of the carnal world, when they ſee his worſhipping ſervants behave towards their Maker, even in his own ſacred houſe, with more rudeneſs and irreverence, than a modeſt ſubject would do in the palace and preſence of an earthly monarch; or even than a well-behaved tenant would do towards his opulent landlord. We would therefore exhort the profeſſing people of God, who are deſirous of ſpreading a ſpirit of piety among others, to practiſe all due reverence and gravity in the worſhip of God. For this purpoſe we invite their attention to the following conſiderations.

1ſt, Conſider, Chriſtians, that this is perhaps the only external means afforded to many of you, of impreſſing the hearts of your fellow-worſhippers with a ſenſe of divine things. The reaſon is obvious; many of them are ſeldom or never ſeen by you between one ſeaſon of worſhip and another. And others of them, with whom you converſe in the

the common affairs of life, cannot with propriety be admitted to your ſecret devotions, in order to be impreſſed by the ſolemnity of what is there tranſacted between God and your own ſouls. And is it not a very deſirable thing, to kindle not only our own devotion, but that of others? Whereas when carnal attendants on public worſhip, diſcern ſcarce any ſigns of devotion in the moſt ſpecious profeſſors, not even while they appear in the houſe of God, where can they ſuppoſe any devotion is to be found? or how ſhall they be prompted to ſeek a thing, which they ſee wanting, even in thoſe who lay the greateſt claim to it? Very ſenſible we are, that one diſcouraging objection lies againſt this; namely, that the moſt eminent Chriſtians may ſometimes be deſtitute of a devout frame in public worſhip; and for them to make an outſide ſhew of ſerioufneſs in that caſe, looks like hypocriſy. What can be more odiouſly hypocritical, than to have a grave countenance, when there is ſo much vanity working in the heart? to have bended knees, when there is ſo much ſtiffneſs in the will? 'Tis anſwered; when theſe bad frames of heart are indulged, at the very ſame time that an external ſerioufneſs and gravity is affected; and that too with a deſign of recommending ourſelves to the eſteem of our fellow-worſhippers, more than of approving ourſelves to the heart-ſearching God:

God: all this is indeed odious phariſaical hypocriſy, yea the very quinteſſence of it. But to put on the utmoſt external gravity and reverence in the worſhip of God, chiefly becauſe God requires it; and to ſtrive earneſtly againſt thoſe bad frames of heart at the ſame time, all this is ſincerity, and a glorious ſelf-combat highly pleaſing to God. Beſides, when this external reverence in divine worſhip is not vain-gloricuſly affected, but endeavoured after becauſe 'tis fit in itſelf, and required by God; it hath the apteſt tendency to bring the frame of the heart into an happy conformity with the external reverence of the body. And this naturally brings us to a

2nd Motive to practiſe external reverence in the worſhip of God. Conſider then that the outward reverence of the body, hath no ſmall tendency to ſtrike the ſoul with a correſpondent reverence. So cloſe is the alliance between ſoul and body, and ſuch a reciprocal influence have their ſeveral actings upon one another, that the devout elevations of the body do ſometimes elevate a groveling ſoul, as well as the lively actings of the ſoul do often rouſe a ſluggiſh body; and the flame of devotion burning in the heart, doth ſometimes ſhine with beams of majeſty in the very countenance, and dart its celeſtial rays through the ſparkling eyes. Beſides, when the body is put into a

reve-

reverent poſture in public worſhip, conſcience cannot ſo quietly or eaſily permit the ſoul to indulge an irreverent frame, but will be ever and anon upbraiding it for the odious inconſiſtency which there is between the outward and inward man. When theſe things are rightly conſidered, how little weight or truth appears in the common ſaying, That in the ſpiritual duty of Prayer the heart is all, and the poſture of the body ſignifies nothing? But who, that underſtands either his Bible, or the frame of human nature, can ſuppoſe or aſſert this? Who is there of common ſenſe, but muſt acknowledge, that if the inward temper of the mind is not ſuperficially, but deeply ſerious, a negligent air neither will, nor can at the time ſit upon the countenance. On the other hand, is it not equally evident, that a lazy poſture of body in divine worſhip, is a ſhrewd token of a dull and ſluggiſh frame of heart. Or if it be not the effect of ſuch a frame, it will probably become the cauſe of it. If the body in divine worſhip is put into a ſluggiſh drowſy poſture, it will in all probability, bring the ſoul into one, before the exerciſe is over. Or if a wandering heart did not at firſt cauſe wandering eyes in prayer; yet wandering eyes will cauſe a wandering heart.

3dly, Conſider that we cannot juſtly plead ſo much impotence in this external part of divine worſhip,

worſhip, as we may do with reſpect to the frame of the heart, and motions of the inward man. The motions of the body being merely natural, the God of nature hath placed them in our power. So that we have a power to ſhut our eyes, or fix them in our devotions, when, it may be, we are not able to ſhut out all vain thoughts, or to fix the mind ſteadily in that duty. We may bend the knees in Prayer, and place our bodies in a lowly poſture, when we cannot bend our hearts, nor as yet attain to thorough lowlineſs and humility of mind in that duty. Or, if we rather chuſe it, we may raiſe our ſluggiſh bodies into a decent erect poſture in this heavenly exerciſe; although we may ſometimes ſtrive in vain to raiſe the ſoul towards heavenly things. Now if we will not do that which we are able to do, with reſpect to the reverent poſture of our bodies; how can we reaſonably expect God ſhould do that for us which we are not able to do, with reſpect to the frame of our hearts in Prayer. On the other hand, would we but more conſcientiouſly and conſtantly exert our abilities in thoſe parts of divine worſhip, which lie within our compaſs of attainment; we are firmly perſuaded, God would more fully and frequently reach out ſufficient help in thoſe ſublimer parts of devotion, which lie beyond our natural abilities. But alas, the unhappineſs is, many of us do not ſo much as we might eaſily do

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as creatures; hence is it, that we make ſuch a ſorry figure as Chriſtians, both in the houſe of God, and in the common paths of life: and hence it is, that profeſſors do ſo very little in religion. Some parts of duty appear ſo low and trivial, that they judge it needleſs to ſtoop to the performance of them; while other parts are deemed ſo high, that they deſpair of reaching them. So that between theſe two extremes, how very little in religion is done at all, or even attempted.

CHAP. IV.

The Scriptural Poſture of the Body in public Prayer, particularly conſidered.

HAVING in the foregoing pages largely urged and recommended external reverence in public Prayer, our diſcourſe upon this topic may juſtly be deemed defective, till we have ſpecified that particular poſture of body, which is moſt obligatory and becoming in that part of public devotion. Now the moſt frequent and ſtated Scripture-poſtures in public Prayer, are *Standing*, and *Kneeling*. Kneeling in public Prayer, was practiſed by King Solomon, 2 Chron. vi. 13. by the famous Jewiſh reformer Ezra, Ezra ix. 5. And by the great Apoſtle of the Gentiles,

Acts

Acts xx. 36. Our chief pattern of Chriſtian worſhip too, viz. the Lord Jeſus, did kneel in Prayer, at leaſt in private Prayer, Luke xxii. 41. But it was undoubtedly public Prayer which the pſalmiſt intended, when he ſaid, O come, let us worſhip and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our Maker, Pſalm xcv. 6.

The other ſcriptural poſture in public Prayer, is Standing. This was once practiſed by the humble and penitent Publican, even when he was engaged in the moſt lowly and ſelf-abaſing part of temple-Prayer, viz. confeſſion of ſin, Luke xviii. 13. And that noted confeſſory Prayer, which was put up by the congregation of Iſrael on a public humiliation day, was delivered in a ſtanding poſture, Nehem. ix. 2. 4. Nay they were even commanded to ſtand up, ſaith the 5th verſe. This ſtanding poſture in Prayer we find approved by our Saviour, in Mark xi. 25. Now upon a review of what has been urged from ſcripture, in favour both of a ſtanding and kneeling poſture in Prayer; we conclude that thoſe worſhippers do beſt conform to the Scripture pattern, who neither ſcruple a ſtanding poſture, nor decline a kneeling one, or who confine themſelves to neither *; but make

* Quere. Do not thoſe worſhipping Congregations deviate from this general rule, and deſerve ſome cenſure; who invariably, and perhaps univerſally confine themſelves to a ſtanding poſture in public Prayer, even on the moſt ſolemn days of faſting and humiliation.

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uſe of both, according as outward convenience, and the frame of the heart direct. They who cenſure their fellow Chriſtians for uſing a ſtanding poſture in Prayer, as not ſufficiently decent and reverent; what do they but ſet up their own fancies, as the chief ſtandard of reverence, inſtead of God's written word; yea do they not extend their uncharitable cenſures, even beyond their cotemporary fellow Chriſtians, to ſome of the moſt devout Scripture ſaints, ſuch as Abraham, Moſes, Samuel, and Nehemiah, with many others? Perſons who thus take Offence at, and ſcruple a ſtanding poſture in Prayer, are manifeſtly haunted with that troubleſome ſpirit of ſuperſtition, which has been ſuch an officious Nurſe to the Mother Church of Rome in foſtering ſo many of her blind and deluded Children.—And as to others, who are aſhamed to lay their bodies ſo low in a public aſſembly, as to fall upon their knees in Prayer, we doubt their ſtiff and high ſpirits have not been ſufficiently humbled, for ſuch a lowly and ſelf-abaſing exerciſe as Prayer. This we think may without breach of charity be affirmed concerning thoſe, who, when they are weary of ſtanding in Prayer, chuſe any lolling irreverent poſture whatever, even that of *ſitting*, rather than that decent ſcripture poſture of *kneeling*. 'Tis true ſcripture itſelf hath been called in as a patronizer and

and encourager of this moſt indolent and irreverent poſture in Prayer; not indeed ſcripture precept, there being not ſo much as one for it, but only one ſingle Scripture example; or rather a mere ſeeming one: viz. that of David ſitting before the Lord, and uttering ſomething like a Prayer, 1 Chron. xvii. 16. But ſome learned Divines have rightly obſerved, that thoſe words, "*David ſat before the Lord*," ſhould have been thus tranſlated, "*David ſtayed or abode before the Lord*:" But admitting the preſent tranſlation, can any be ſure that becauſe we read of David ſitting before the Lord, and then offering up his Prayer to Him, that he did not change his ſitting poſture into a ſtanding one, before he actually began his Prayer. In 1 Kings viii. 22. it is ſaid, *that Solomon ſtood before the altar of the Lord, and ſpread forth his hands towards Heavin and ſaid*, "*Lord God of Iſrael*, &c." and yet in the following 54th verſe of the ſame Chapter we are informed, that he changed his ſtanding into a kneeling poſture in the ſame Prayer, and at the very beginning of it, as the parallel paſſage in 2 Chron. vi. 13. aſſures us. Beſides it is unſafe to take pattern from one ſingle doubtful inſtance in the practice of David, which not only differed from his own common practice in Prayer at other times, but alſo from the practice of all other

Scripture ſaints, whom we read of; and is likewiſe contrary to all the known rules of decency.

Before we diſmiſs this Topic, we cannot forbear taking occaſion from what has been ſaid, to animadvert upon an indecent Cuſtom which prevails among ſeveral otherwiſe ſerious Chriſtians; we mean that of ſitting at Table while they are ſolemnly praying down a divine Bleſſing upon their Food, and afterwards returning God thanks for it. Extraordinary caſes may indeed ſometimes warrant a ſitting Poſture on theſe Occaſions. Hence we find it practiſed even by our Lord in a certain very peculiar caſe. But turning it into a general practice will ſurely admit of no Plea except that of fooliſh Cuſtom. Saying Grace at Meat being real ſet Prayer, doth certainly demand a praying poſture. Why then is a praying poſture avoided; avoided too, not merely for a time through neceſſity; but conſtantly and of choice? Certainly it cannot be juſtly pleaded, that it is generally inconvenient, or too troubleſome to uſe a ſtanding praying poſture on theſe Occaſions; ſince ſtanding is the very Poſture that Perſons are in when they make their firſt approach to the Table, and alſo when they withdraw again at the concluſion of the Meal.

And is it not altogether ridiculous, for perſons needleſsly to change a more reverent poſture, into a leſs

a leſs reverent one, before they will addreſs God in Prayer, at the beginning of a meal; and afterwards to continue a leſs reverent poſture in that exerciſe; ſeeing even neceſſity ſo ſoon after puts them into a more reverent poſture? Oh Cuſtom, how binding is thy power! how bewitching thine influence!

CHAP. V.

The proper Actings of the Soul in thoſe who join in Public Prayer.

IN ſeveral foregoing pages we have largely deſcribed, and warmly recommended external reverence, and a fit poſture of body in public Prayer. But if we reſt in theſe outſides, we ſhall be ſo far from delineating a true Devotioniſt, that the character we have drawn will be no better than that of a painted Phariſee, or diſguiſed hypocrite. Let us then turn our views from the poſture of the body, to the proper actings of the ſoul in Prayer. Without theſe, uplifted eyes and hands, and the moſt lowly genuflexion in Prayer, will be of no more eſteem with God, than the different movements and geſticulations of a lifeleſs puppet on a ſtage. Indeed Prayer is no Prayer,

when the mind is not engaged in it, as well as the body. As reaſonable is it to pretend to think of God with our hands, or love Him with our feet, as to worſhip Him only with our bodies. "*God is a Spirit, and they that worſhip Him, muſt worſhip Him in Spirit*, elſe they worſhip him not in truth, John iv. 24." This inward ſpiritual Prayer doth, we apprehend, conſiſt in three things. 1ſt. In the fixedneſs of the thoughts. 2dly, In the motion of the affections.—And 3dly, in the language of the ſoul.

1ſt. In fixing or engaging our thoughts in ſuch a manner, as to go along with the Prayer of the common ſpeaker. David muſt ſay, "*My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed*;" before he could add, "*I will ſing and give praiſe*," Pſ. 57. The like muſt we be able to ſay, before we can pray to any good purpoſe. A roving mind or fancy, in full chaſe after vain and carnal things, utterly mars the beſt worded Prayer, and the moſt lowly proſtration of body; yea it renders the whole offering an heap of ſhameful abſurdities and profaneneſs in the eye and eſteem of the heart-ſearching God. *Hallowed be thy name*, ſaith the common ſpeaker in Prayer; *I have a better name than ſuch a one*, ſaith the heart of his fellow worſhipper. *Thy kingdom come*, ſaith the common mouth in Prayer; *ſuch a piece of news came lately*

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from a neighbouring kingdom, ſay the carnal thoughts of another fellow-worſhipper. *Give us this day our daily bread*, ſaith the Leader in public Prayer; the *Gibeonites came with old clouted ſhoes*, and *mouldy bread*, ſaith the rambling imagination of a third fellow-worſhipper.

What a ridiculous profane medley is Prayer, when intermingled with ſuch carnal thoughts as theſe! Who durſt offer up ſuch a Prayer to God, if the whole of it were cloathed in words? But does not every carnal worſhiper, bring as abſurd a medley-offering as this before God, in almoſt every Prayer he joins in? God grant this familiar repreſentation may make us aſhamed of every thing like it, and for ever deter us from it.

But how much ſooner may an evil of this ſort be ſeen and diſapproved, than redreſſed! In nothing is the corruption and weakneſs of human nature more lamentably experienced, than in the depravity and ungovernableneſs of the thoughts in devotional exerciſes. When the ſoul ſhould riſe to God in Prayer, how often doth it ſend forth ſwarms of vain thoughts, which, like locuſts out of the bottomleſs pit, hang in cluſters upon each praying requeſt! To expel them effectually, would be a taſk more difficult than Abraham undertook, in driving away thoſe numerous birds of prey, which darted down upon his ſacrifices.

Gen. xv. But it muſt be done, if we would not have thoſe holy offerings which we bring to God's altar, devoured before our very faces, by theſe vermin-offspring of the heart. Let our chriſtian zeal therefore arm itſelf with the utmoſt reſolution and watchfulneſs againſt theſe ſacrilegious enemies, which would at once rob a good God of his due, and our own ſouls of all edification and benefit by Prayer. When we find our hearts overpowered by theſe intruders, let us lift up a ſecret cry to heaven, and call Omnipotence to our help. "O Lord, I am oppreſſed; undertake for me."—At the beginning of every praying exerciſe, let us endeavour after ſuch an awful ſenſe of the omnipreſence and omniſcience of the Divine Majeſty, that our hearts may not dare *to play the fool before him.*—In the proceſs of this duty, perſons of weak capacities will find it a ſingular help to fix their thoughts, and keep up their attention through every part of the exerciſe, if they follow each word in the Speaker's Prayer with the ſilent language of their lips. Again, in order to render Prayer a delightful, profitable, or even practicable ſervice; the heart muſt be previouſly tinctured with a ſpirit of true piety and devotion. For how can ſpiritual thoughts flow from a carnal heart? *Doth a fountain ſend forth at the ſame place ſweet water and bitter?* Jam. iii. Laſtly,

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if we would more eaſily and effectually faſten our thoughts to ſpiritual things in our public devotions, we muſt habituate ourſelves to a ſpiritual train of thinking in common life. If vain worldly ſenſual thoughts (oh dreadful conſideration!) do fill our whole minds all the ſix days, it will almoſt be impoſſible to clear the room all at once; and find it filled with ſuch contrary gueſts as holy and ſpiritual thoughts in God's Houſe of Prayer.

2dly. Another neceſſary ingredient in right ſpiritual Prayer are ſpiritual affections. It is not enough that the prayer we join in be underſtood by us, and that our thoughts go along with all the words of it: this is not praying; but only thinking over a Prayer: It is not the thoughts or contemplations of the mind, be they ever ſo holy; but the deſires of the heart, properly directed, which conſtitute the ſoul of Prayer. Theſe deſires, which ſhould animate every Prayer, are ſo ſtrongly expreſſed in the ſacred Records, that nothing can be more ſo. Sometimes they are called the *Pourings out of the heart and ſoul before the Lord*, 1 Sam. i. 15. Pſ. lxii. 8. Theſe phraſes intimate, that the Devotioniſt ſhould ſend up his praying requeſts with as much ardor and earneſtneſs, as if he would ſend forth his very heart and ſoul along with them. Again, theſe deſires of the heart in Prayer are ſometimes ſtiled by the emphatical name of *breathings*, Lament. iii. 56.

"*Hide not thine ear at my breathing*;" a term well underſtood by devout Chriſtians, when they ardently ſend forth the very breath of their bodies, along with the Prayer that's put up; although themſelves do not utter a ſingle word. In other places of Scripture they are called *Pantings*, Pſ. 42. which is a ſtill ſtronger expreſſion; and ſets forth an higher ſtrain of devotion, viz. when the devout Chriſtian longs ſo earneſtly after the thing prayed for, that his very heart pants or beats for it. Now all theſe nervous and lively expreſſions, plainly intimate that the ſoul of him who joins the common mouth in Prayer ſhould not be merely paſſive, but active; that he ſhould not place himſelf under the Prayer, which the Miniſter or private Chriſtian utters, like iron underneath the ſmith's hammer, to be wrought upon and moved by the ſtriking eloquence and fervency of the Speaker. No, the heart of him who ſilently joins in Prayer, ſhould be in as much active motion, as the lips of the Speaker. It ſhould meet each ſentence of the Prayer as it were half way, and bring it home by an actual ſelf-application. The deſires of the devout worſhipper ſhould reſemble the arms of one, who is eagerly reaching up at ſome very deſirable object above his head. This indeed chiefly reſpects the petitionary part of Prayer.

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The other parts, viz. Adoration, Confeſſion, and Thankſgiving, require different actings of the ſoul: Admiration in the firſt; Remorſe and Grief of heart in the ſecond; and Love, Hope, and Joy in the third. When the Being and Attributes of God are ſet forth and celebrated in the firſt part of Prayer; 'tis not enough for the perſon who joins that part, to think over the repreſentation, and believe it to be true, (for that falls vaſtly ſhort of Prayer,) but to be affected by it in a way of admiration and reverence. When ſin is confeſſed, 'tis not ſufficient for thoſe who join to think thus, "I am or have been guilty of theſe ſins," (for this hath nothing of Prayer in it;) but 'tis to feel the actual workings of ſhame, grief, and humiliation in our hearts, while the confeſſory part of Prayer is uttered by the lips. The like may be ſaid of the thankſgiving part of Prayer.

"And now, O my ſoul, canſt thou need any "motives to excite in thee thoſe impreſſions and "affections in Prayer, which have been enume-"rated under this laſt particular? How ſolemn "the duty in which thou engageſt! How im-"portant the errand on which thou goeſt! And "how immenſely great and majeſtic the Being "whom thou addreſſeſt! even a God in whoſe "ſight the ſpacious *heavens* are but as *a ſpan*, the "great globe of the earth as *a grain of duſt*, and

" all the waters of the ocean but as a *drop of the* " *bucket*. And canſt thou addreſs ſuch a ma- " jeſtic Being without reverence; ſuch an om- " nipotent Being without fear; ſuch a faithful " Being without truſt; and ſuch an infinitely " good, gracious and merciful Being, without " raptures of love and joy? Again, conſider what " thou thyſelf art, who entereſt into the preſence " of this infinitely great and glorious Jehovah! " A creature; a ſinner; a worm; duſt; yea a " mere nothing, at leaſt in compariſon of Him, " before whom *all nations* are *accounted* as *nothing* " and *vanity* †. And can ſuch a vile hell-deſerv- " ing creature as I, do any other but ſhrink into " the very bottom of my being, in the acts of " ſelf-abaſement, when I enter into the preſence " of Him, before whom Angels, Cherubim and " Seraphim veil their humble faces, and the Elders " proſtrate themſelves, and caſt their crowns at his " feet! Furthermore, let me conſider what an " important errand I go upon to a throne of " Grace by Prayer. An errand more important, " than that which brings a beggar to a rich man's " door, or a guilty criminal before an earthly " judge. And yet how eagerly will the one ſup- " plicate for bread, and the other for life? And " ſhall I pray leſs earneſtly for grace and heaven,

† Iſaiah xl. 17.

" than

"than a beggar for a cruſt of bread; and be leſs "importunate for eternal than a convict would "be for temporal life?" We now proceed,

3dly, To the language of the ſoul in Prayer. We are ready to charge thoſe with a capital miſtake, who place the whole of internal Prayer, in the contemplation of the mind, and the bare workings of the affections *abſtractly conſidered*. For who knows not that the affections may operate in a way of fear, grief, love, deſire, and admiration, under the ſeveral parts of a ſermon? yet theſe workings of the affections can hardly deſerve the name of heart-prayer, except they fix on the only proper object of divine worſhip, and be formed into a kind of language. This language of the ſoul in Prayer, not only conſiſts in making the ſeveral expreſſions of the common ſpeaker in Prayer its own; but in yielding an aſſent at the concluſion of each ſentence. And indeed a thorough aſſent can ſeldom be made before the concluſion of a ſentence in another's Free Prayer; becauſe 'till then, we cannot always aſſuredly know what it will be. Now theſe echoes of aſſent at the end of each ſentence in another's Prayer, may be fitly termed *mental Reſponſes*; which are proper appendages to ſocial worſhip, and do anſwer ſome important purpoſes in it, hereafter to be named. Some indeed may think

it ſcarce poſſible to accompany another's Prayer with their underſtandings and affections, and to mingle *ſecret Reſponſes* of their own therewith at the ſame time. But why may not that be practicable in this caſe, which in other parallel caſes is ſo eaſily practiſed every day? In converſation, can we not underſtand the ſpeaker, be touched by what he ſaid; and, at the ſame time, draw inferences or concluſions from the main drift of his diſcourſe? Yea we cannot perhaps avoid doing it. And why can we not do the like when we join in a plain Prayer, diſtinctly and deliberately delivered? Certainly the perſons who urge this objection, do not rightly conſider the ſprightly, active nature of the human ſoul, which, in the twinkling of an eye, paſſeth from one operation to another, and a different one. When any thing very ſuitable and ſtriking is preſented to the underſtanding, it inſtantaneouſly gives motion to the affections; the affections being ſtruck, rebound again, and produce reflections in the mind as naturally as ſun-beams are reflected from a bright mirror. Now theſe reflections, when applied to another's Prayer, are thoſe very *Reſponſes* of the heart which we are now recommending; and they do almoſt as naturally and freely flow, from the heart of a pious fellow-worſhipper, under a ſpiritual affecting Prayer, as the hollow rock echoes back

back the ſound which was conveyed to it. 'Tis granted, all devout worſhippers are not capable of intermingling large Reſponſes in the Prayer which they join: nor is it adviſable to attempt it. Some of dull capacities can perhaps do no more than intermix a few ſhort common-place ejaculations with it; ſuch as, *Lord this is my caſe: Lord pardon this ſin: God grant me this favour: God make me thankful for theſe mercies.* Now, even ſuch ſhort ejaculatory Reſponſes as theſe (whereof the dulleſt Devotioniſts are capable) will be found great enliveners of ſocial Prayer. Yea, were a fellow-worſhipper to do nothing more, than conclude each affecting clauſe in Prayer with a fervent Amen, darted from the very bottom of the heart in a ſilent manner; even thus much, might add conſiderable life to a Prayer. We ſay, *in a ſilent manner:* For to utter theſe intermediate Reſponſes with an audible voice, will, we apprehend, in no wiſe help the devotion of thoſe who thus uſe them; but may greatly diſturb the devotion of their fellow-worſhippers, and more eſpecially of him who is their common mouth in Prayer. 'Tis true, if any worſhippers find their thoughts better fixed, and their devotion more excited by uttering theſe Reſponſes with their lips, they may do it in ſuch a ſilent manner, that their very nearſt fellow-worſhippers cannot hear ſo much as a whiſ-

whiſper from them. And perhaps this is the beſt expedient we have hitherto propoſed, both for fixing the thoughts in Prayer, and exciting devotion in it. When the devout Mother of Samuel went up to public worſhip in Shiloh, it is ſaid, 1 Sam. i. 12, 13. "*It came to paſs as ſhe continued praying before the Lord, that Eli marked her mouth: Now Hannah ſpake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard.*"

Having thus deſcribed the nature, and demonſtrated the practicability of *mental Reſponſes* in ſocial Prayer; we ſhall next conſider the ſingular advantages attending them.

1ſt, They tend to keep the ſoul more wakeful and active in Prayer, than when it wholly leans to that particular ſet of words and phraſes which the common ſpeaker utters. In the former, the ſoul every now and then darts its deſires to heaven by particular acts of its own: and this tends to make it more heavenly minded, and prevents its ſinking into a dull and ſluggiſh frame.

2dly, By the help of theſe mental Reſponſes, or reflex actings of the ſoul, the moſt general Prayer uttered by the common ſpeaker, may be brought down to the moſt particular caſes, and adapted to the preſent circumſtances of every worſhipper; and thereby be rendered more heart-affecting. Thus when confeſſion is made of ſin in general,

general, or thanks returned for mercies belonging to a congregation in common, each worſhipper may caſt a reflex view on ſome ſin or mercy peculiar to himſelf, and may lift up a penitent or thankful heart accordingly.

3dly, The intermingling of mental Reſponſes in public worſhip, relieves the cauſe of Free Prayer againſt certain objections. Hath it been alledged, that perſons who join in Free Prayer may be made to pray nonſenſe; or at leaſt to leave an unſeemly gap in their devotions, in caſe the common Speaker commit a blunder in Prayer? But how ſoon and eaſily may a miſtake in the common Speaker be turned into a wiſe and devout addreſs by his fellow-worſhippers: as thus; *Lord, what erring, imperfect creatures are we!* Again, has it been objected, that thoſe who ſeem to reject public Forms, do themſelves always pray by a Form, yea a ſtinted one, ſeeing they confine themſelves to that ſet of expreſſions which their Miniſter utters in his extempore Prayer? But how can that with any propriety be termed a ſtinted Form, which is a Free Prayer, both on the part of him who utters it, and on their part who join in it; ſeeing by the help of extempore Reſponſes, they adapt it to their own particular circumſtances? And indeed it is contrary to the free genius of Diſſenters, to confine themſelves ſervilely to any ſet of words

words and expreſſions in religion, except thoſe of Scripture.

4thly, By the aſſiſtance of mental Reſponſes, worſhippers of different frames and ſentiments, may conſiſtently and conſcientiouſly carry on their public devotions by one and the ſame public Prayer. So widely different, yea ſometimes contrary, are the frames and ſentiments of a Congregation of worſhippers, that ſome have thence argued againſt all public ſocial Prayer: ſuppoſing that no one Prayer, whether free or precompoſed, can be adapted to all the members of a Congregation, except it contains contradictions. Hence they have taken occaſion to abſent wholly from public ſocial Prayer. But how eaſily is this difficulty got over by the help of theſe ſilent Reſponſes, which are not prefixed, but left to be conceived and formed by them, according to their own various frames and ſentiments? From what hath been now ſaid, we conclude there is more ſound than ſenſe in that empty parade, with which a late Author attempts to expoſe thoſe public Prayers, which are conceived and uttered by the Miniſter, without any precompoſed Form. "In this caſe, ſays he, I am obliged to pray as he does. I have come from my houſe a ſound orthodox Chriſtian, and have hardly taken my ſeat in the Church, when I have found myſelf praying,

ing, or at leaſt one was praying in my name, as a rank Socinian. I have been made an Arian as to my Prayers very often. If the Miniſter that officiates be a Sceptic, I am made to pray like a Sceptic; if an enthuſiaſt, he addreſſes God in my name according to his own enthuſiaſtical notions *," &c.

But let us aſk this Gentleman, whether this inconſiſtency is more likely to cleave to thoſe Free Prayers, in which the Reſponſes belonging to the Congregation are equally free, and left to be conceived and formed by them, according to their own various frames and ſentiments; or to thoſe precompoſed Prayers in which the Reſponſes belonging to the Congregation are fixed too, ſo as to grant no ſuch allowances to differing frames and ſentiments? Beſides, it is ſelf-evident, that variable Free Prayer is more likely to be adapted to the changing ſentiments of different ages and places than that fixed national Liturgy which this Author pleads for.

This chapter ſhall conclude with three rules of advice, proper to be obſerved by all who join in public Prayer.

1ſt, Let no ſuppoſed excellency of the public Prayer, be it ever ſo affecting, induce you to neglect the aſſiſting influences of the Holy Spirit. Believe it, the Spirit of God muſt help fellow-

* Blackſmith's Letter.

worſhip-

worſhippers in receiving a Prayer, as well as the Maſter of the Aſſembly in conceiving it. Let a Prayer be ever ſo happily framed, and affectionately delivered; let it charm the ear, and ſtrike the fancy and paſſions ever ſo ſtrongly; yet this alone cannot kindle a flame of pure devotion, and holy deſires in the hearts of a Congregation; nor excite in them that ſelf-abaſing, ſelf-reſigned diſpoſition of mind, which this duty indiſpenſibly requires. Certainly, if the word of God be not effectual without the quickening Spirit; much leſs the words of mere men. When Congregations therefore enter on public Prayer, let them earneſtly implore the aids of the Holy Spirit; notwithſtanding both the matter and words of the Prayer be provided to their hand.

2dly, Let no veneration for the parts or piety of the officiating Miniſter, draw off your believing views, and admiring regards from Chriſt, that glorious Goſpel High Prieſt, and only Mediator between God and man. Though the Miniſter, who addreſſeth God in your names, be clothed in ever ſuch venerable and grave veſtments; tho' his tongue be tipt with ever ſo much eloquence; and his heart glow ever ſo much with the fervours of devotion; yet he cannot of himſelf lift up the Prayers of his Congregation to Heaven, ſo as to fetch down Divine Bleſſings from thence. No, Chriſt

Chriſt the Angel of the Covenant muſt do this, by virtue of that incenſe with which He offers up the Prayers of all ſaints, Rev. viii. 3. Let worſhipping Congregations therefore look beyond their officiating Miniſters, to this Goſpel High Prieſt, who is ſet over the houſe of God: Let them look to Him by faith, not only at the end of Prayer, but through all the principal parts thereof. In Confeſſion let their faith fix on Him, through whom alone forgiveneſs is to be obtained. In Petition, let them eye Him, for whoſe ſake petitions are granted. In Interceſſion, let them act faith on his prevailing interceſſion at the right hand of God. And in Thankſgiving, let them regard all their mercies as flowing to them through the channel of his merits.—Prayers thus offered up, by the aſſiſtance of the Spirit, and through the merits of the Son, how pleaſing are they to God! how profitable to our own ſouls!

3dly, Let ſocial Prayer be always attended with ſocial diſpoſitions. The very nature of this exerciſe indiſpenſibly requires it. If when our Devotioniſt meets his fellow-worſhippers at a throne of grace, he aims at nothing more than centering his thoughts and affections on God, and fixing his faith on Chriſt; or terminating his views in his own ſins, wants, mercies, and miſeries; we appre-

apprehend he widely miſtakes one great end of public Prayer. Undoubtedly the grand deſign of ſocial worſhip, is to promote as much Unity among worſhipping Chriſtians, as there is oneneſs in the Prayer which all join in; and to draw their hearts nearer to one another, as well as nearer to God. An harmony of hearts is more neceſſary in public Prayer, than an harmony of voices in public praiſe. For hearts to jar, and harbour envy and enmity againſt one another, when they meet at a throne of grace, is to offer as high an affront to the King of Heaven, as it would do to an earthly monarch, if his ſubjects were to gather around his throne, and commence a quarrel in his royal preſence. When Chriſtians therefore go on a Lord's Day morning to the Houſe of Prayer, they ſhould not only deſire to be at peace with their Maker, but with one another; as our Saviour directs in Matt. v. 14. ſuch ſhould cultivate brotherly love, benevolence, and ſympathy: in a word, they muſt not only feel for themſelves, but for one another; and ſhould cordially deſire the welfare of all their fellow worſhippers, as they do their own; otherwiſe they cannot ſincerely join them in putting up one general Prayer, in which they requeſt the very ſame favours for them, that they do for themſelves; much leſs can they ſucceed either for others or themſelves. Let the above

above mentioned rule then be rightly obſerved, and the conſequence will be glorious. When a ſociety of praying Chriſtians, happily united in love and ſympathy, do all meet on the ſame ſpot, do all take hold of the ſame cord, and unanimouſly draw the ſame way, what mighty bleſſings may they not bring down from Heaven?

CHAP. VI.

The Nature and Propriety of vocal Reſponſes in public Prayer conſidered, and the Practice recommended.

HAVING briefly treated upon the nature and advantages of mental Reſponſes, when ſeaſonably intermingled in public Prayer, our ſubject now requires us to take notice of Vocal ones; which are to conclude each individual Prayer. The former ought to vary according to the different frames and ſentiments of different worſhippers. But theſe latter ſhould be invariably the ſame. However, to the intent that worſhipers differing in their ſentiments, may not have their conſciences fettered by uttering verbal Reſponſes of too limited a meaning, the Holy-Ghoſt hath wiſely choſen a Reſponſe, which carries a more general meaning in it, viz. the word Amen; a term ſo peculiarly proper in this caſe, that all

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Tranſlators of the Bible have thought fit to retain it as they found it in the Original. It is Amen, in the Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, as well as in the Engliſh language. This vocal Amen, ſaith a Divine of the laſt age, is as it were the epitome and ſum of all our petitions and praiſes to God: or we may call it the echo of the heart and voice to what was ſpoken before. This meaning doth Scripture affix to the word Amen. See 1 Kings 1ſt Chapter, 36th Verſe, where Benaiah, having received ſome ſolemn inſtructions from King David, he echos back his Amen to them, and then explains what he intended by it; "*And he ſaid Amen; the Lord God of my Lord the King ſay ſo too;*" or the Lord grant theſe requeſts. In the like ſenſe is this word to be taken in Jerem. xxviii. 6. where Jeremiah concludes Hananiah's words with an Amen. "*The prophet Jeremiah ſaid Amen, the Lord do ſo; the Lord perform thy words.*" Now that worſhiping congregations ſhould conclude public Prayer with their vocal Amens will appear if we conſider,

1ſt. That the very nature of things points out ſomething of this ſort. How natural is it for the lips to ſound an echo as it were to what deeply affects the heart! Will even the ſenſeleſs rock return an echo to the ſound of the ax or hammer, when

when it agitates the air; and will not the lips of a devout worſhiper be equally diſpoſed to reſound the ſtrong feelings of an heart, deeply affected by the foregoing Prayer? Certainly when the heart is full, it naturally ſtruggles for a vent through the lips; and though it find a vent only by means of a ſingle Amen, ardently breathed forth, even this gives a kind of eaſe and refreſhment to a devout ſoul; as well as a ſingle groan would do to a pained body. When a very affecting Prayer hath been put up in the preſence, and on the behalf of perſons in a dangerous diſeaſe, and looking death in the face; how often have we heard them breath forth an audible Amen with great earneſtneſs, as if it were the natural language of the heart in its moſt ſerious frame; ſeeing they did not practiſe it while in health and gaiety of ſpirits, nor knew that Scripture enjoined the practice of it? But now the near proſpect of death hath made them ſerious and in good earneſt. And if we joined in Prayer with as much ſeriouſneſs and earneſtneſs, as dying men do in ſuch a caſe, it is probable our lips as well as hearts would echo forth an Amen to it.

2dly. It is highly fit and reaſonable, that we honour God with our lips and voices in public Prayer, as well as with our bended knees or uplifted hands. But how can we do this if we utter

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not a ſingle word throughout the whole Prayer, nor at the concluſion of it? Certainly every thing relating to public worſhip ſhould itſelf be public, ſo far as it tends not to breed confuſion. Now though it may create confuſion, and hinder devotion, (beſides its differing from primitive cuſtom *,) when a Congregation ſends up a multitude of voices all the while that the Miniſter prays; yet for them to pronounce an audible Amen at the concluſion, cannot be attended with any confuſion or indecency; but rather decently fills up an empty gap between a Miniſter's Prayer and the next part of his work. Beſides, it is by this very means that a Prayer is made a public one on the part of the Congregation, who joined the common Speaker only with their ſecret thoughts and affections, till it came to the concluding Amen.

3dly. The venerable pattern of the pureſt and primitive Chriſtian Churches, may be further urged in favour of the practice which we are now recommending. Juſtin Martyr, who wrote about

* See Lord Chancellor King's enquiry into the Conſtitution, Diſcipline, Unity and worſhip of the Primitive Church, p. 26, 27.

St. Cyprian too produces three arguments to prove that it is more expedient for the joining Congregation to follow the Miniſter's Prayer only wi h the language of the heart or at leaſt the ſilent language of the lips. Cyprian de Orat. Domini p. 140.

forty

forty years after the Apoſtles, informs us that the Paſtor in his time uſed, according to his abilities, to ſend up his Thanks and Prayers, and the People ſaid Amen; yea, adds he, they concluded the Miniſter's Prayer with an audible Amen. This he aſſerts three times in one ſingle leaf of his writings. See his 2 Apol. p. 97, 98. Again, St. Chryſoſtom in one part of his works, affirms that the Congregation concluded the Miniſter's Prayer with ſuch an audible Amen, that it reſembled thunder.

St. Jerom alſo aſſures us, that it was a cuſtom in his days to cloſe every Prayer with ſuch an unanimous conſent; that their Amens rang and echoed in their worſhiping aſſemblies, and ſounded like the fall of waters. In another place the ſame Father obſerves, that the hollow idols and their empty temples did echo and reſound the Church's Amens; ſo that their fabricks did in ſome ſort ſhake.

And by the way theſe teſtimonies do not only prove that the Congregation's vocal Amen at the concluſion of public Prayer, was a prevailing cuſtom in the ages directly after the Apoſtles times; but they render it very probable that the ſame cuſtom prevailed even in the Apoſtolic age; for as one of the Fathers before mentioned wrote within leſs than half a century after the Apoſtles days, either he or his parents muſt have ſeen with

their own eyes, what was the cuſtom of the Churches in the Apoſtles times. It cannot therefore reaſonably be apprehended, that the Omiſſion of theſe Reſponſes, took its riſe from the Diſapprobation or Diſuſe of them, by the primitive Church in its firſt and pureſt ages. But in ſome it might poſſibly ariſe from the decay of the piety of the primitive Chriſtians, and ſuch a Declenſion of the lively ſpirit of Devotion, as rendered the Miniſter's Prayers leſs affecting to the People, and the People leſs inclinable to anſwer them with an echo of the heart and voice. Now all muſt allow that a Decay of inward Devotion, can be no juſtifiable excuſe for dropping thoſe Externals of Religion, which have ſo good and indiſputable an Authority to enforce them. But the more general cauſe ſeems to be, an offence juſtly taken with the falſe Ornaments of Men's invention and addition, to the forms of Divine Worſhip; but raiſed ſo immoderately high, as to lead many on their Separation from thoſe Churches which practiſed them, to lop off with thoſe Excreſcences, ſome other Uſages of earlier date, and purer origin, on account of the Perſons and Churches that uſed them, in connection with their own ceremonial Adulterations of religious Worſhip *. But

* N. B. Some venerable remains of this primitive cuſtom are ſtill found in our Epiſcopal Churches. But may

But after all, ſome may plead that though the nature and reaſon of things, backed by ſuch authentic primitive cuſtom, be of conſiderable weight, yet it is ſcripture authority which muſt turn the balance; that being the alone divinely authorized ſtandard both in doctrines of faith, and modes of worſhip. Therefore we proceed to obſerve,

4thly, That holy Scripture ſays as much in favour of a concluding Amen, as of any one circumſtance relating to public Prayer.

David, that moſt eminent pattern of devotion under the Old Teſtament, doth in his excellent collection of Prayers, bid not merely the Prieſts and Levites, but *all* the People to ſay Amen; not only to *think*, but *ſay* it. Pſ. cvi. 48. Again, in Num. v. 22. The women are commanded to repeat an audible Amen to ſuch and ſuch things, uttered by the Prieſt. But more eſpecially, in the 27th Chapter of Deuteronomy, *all* the worſhiping People are no leſs than twelve times expreſly commanded to ſhut up the Levites ſervices,

may we not aſk why theſe Amen-reſponſes, which equally belong to a whole worſhipping Congregation, are for the moſt part confined to their Precentors or Clerks? Why muſt their Congregations reſpond their Miniſter's Prayer *only*, or *chiefly* by proxy, when they are preſent to reſpond or anſwer for themſelves? Or can any good reaſon be aſſigned, why the people ſhould bear a part in all the other Reſponſals which men have deviſed; and not in this Amen Reſponſal which the Holy Ghoſt has authorized?

with a vocal Amen, ſee from the 5th verſe to the end of the Chap. Thus you find the practice recommended by a ſufficient number of old teſtament precepts. In the 6th Chap. of the former book of Chronicles, Aſaph the chief Levite having made a long and excellent thankſgiving Prayer, it is affirmed in the 36th verſe, that all the People ſaid Amen at the end of it. Another pregnant inſtance we have in the 8th chapter of Nehemiah, where, after Nehemiah had bleſſed the Lord God, i. e. prayed to him, it is ſaid in the 6th verſe that all the People anſwered Amen *.

Thus the practice in queſtion, appears well founded in ancient precepts and patterns, without any juſt pretence of its being peculiar to the Old Teſtament diſpenſation, for the New Teſtament itſelf affords evidence in favour of it. Not to inſiſt on that emblematic practice of the Goſpel Church in Rev. v. 14. we have a much clearer and more unexceptionable proof in 1 Cor. xiv. 16. where it

* N. B. So far were the Jews of later times from deſpiſing or neglecting theſe old-teſtament precepts and precedents, which plead for Congregations concluding public prayer with their Amens, that they conceived perhaps too high a veneration for the cuſtom. Hence the common ſaying of theirs, namely that he who pronounceth this Amen as he ought, is greater than he who bleſſeth in the name of the Lord, i. e. than he who is the common mouth in Prayer; yea, ſay they, he that pronounceth this Amen with all his might, the gates of heaven fly open to him.

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appears that the method of Congregations concluding the Prayers of their common Speaker with a vocal Amen, was ſo common and well eſtabliſhed in the Apoſtle Paul's time, that he borrows an argument from it, whereby to overthrow a very abſurd cuſtom which had then crept into ſome Chriſtian Aſſemblies, namely, of praying in a tongue which common illiterate worſhippers did not underſtand, verſe 14. Now, ſays the Apoſtle in the 16th verſe, when this is the caſe, *how ſhall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned ſay Amen to thy giving of thanks*, i. e. to thy thankſgiving Prayer? Surely if he does not underſtand the language of thy Prayer, he cannot underſtand the Prayer itſelf, ſo as to join in it; and therefore cannot echo back a rational Amen to it. Thus we have produced ſundry arguments and teſtimonies both Divine and human, in favour of concluding public Prayer with a vocal Amen. And now let our Readers fairly weigh theſe arguments in equal ſcales, without any of thoſe antecedent prejudices which *put light for darkneſs, and darkneſs for light*. To perſons prepoſſeſſed with prejudice, the ſtrongeſt arguments will ſcarce be ſo ſatisfactory as to ſilence all cavils. Inclination often oppoſes, in caſes where conſcience is convinced; at leaſt prevails to blind the mind, and bias the judgment. But here it may be aſked, whether

it is expedient for a Congregation of Worſhippers to conclude the Miniſter's Prayer with an audible Amen; why will not a ſilent Amen ſuffice? We reply; becauſe it doth not anſwer the chief end of the thing intended by it. For, as hath been already hinted, it is the audibleneſs of the Amen, which conſtitutes or indicates a Prayer a public one, on the part of the Congregation who join the Miniſter in it. When only the inward thoughts and affections of the people go along with the Miniſter's Prayer, they may in that caſe be ſaid to pray, yea to pray in a public place; but not to perform public Prayer. No, it is only a ſecret Prayer, till by an audible Amen at the concluſion, they bear a public teſtimony to it; and do thereby declare it their own Prayer. Beſides an audible Amen reverently and fervently * uttered by a Congregation at the concluſion of Prayer, adds conſiderable ſolemnity to public worſhip; and cuts off one popular objection urged againſt the mode of worſhip practiſed among Diſſenters, namely "that it is too bare and ſolitary." Now though the word of God gives ſufficient authority, and the Spirit of

* We would by all means adviſe that this concluding Amen be pronounced in ſuch a manner, as may indicate it, at leaſt in the ear of charity, to be the real echo of the heart.

God

God ſufficient life and ornament to the mode of worſhip which anſwers to the new Teſtament platform, be it ever ſo plain and ſimple; (and to go beyond this would rather deaden than enliven, and ſully than beautify Chriſtian worſhip:) yet if Diſſenters will indeed ſtrip it of an ornament in which Scripture has dreſſed it, we leave them to ſhape their own anſwer to the foregoing objection; for we confeſs ourſelves unable to do it. Do any now enquire why Diſſenters, who profeſs an exact conformity to the Scripture platform in their public worſhip, do ſo generally neglect this Apoſtolic practice, and primitive cuſtom of concluding ſocial Prayer with an audible Amen? We anſwer; this may be in part owing to the narrowneſs of the human mind, which, when very intent on one thing, is apt to overlook another; eſpecially when that other is of a widely different nature. The antient Puritans, who modelled the public worſhip of Diſſenters, had, at leaſt ſeemed to have ſuch an high regard for the eſſentials of Divine worſhip, that it is no wonder if they overlooked ſome of its circumſtantials; notwithſtanding their having ſuch an apparent foundation in Scripture. Beſides when it is conſidered what hard treatment that pious body of people met with in thoſe perſecuting times for their Nonconformity to unſcriptural ceremonies; it is no wonder, conſidering

ſidering the weakneſs of human nature, that they conceived an univerſal diſtaſte to all ceremonies in general; even to thoſe which were founded in the New Teſtament. But after all, Diſſenters of the laſt age did not ſo univerſally reject this Apoſtolical practice and primitive cuſtom of concluding public Prayer with a vocal Amen, as many imagine. The London Miniſters bore a printed teſtimony in favour of it *. The celebrated Mr. Baxter too hath recommended it in his Chriſtian Directory, p. 672. So alſo hath one of the moſt eminent Divines in Ireland repeated his approbation of it again and again †. To theſe we might ſubjoin more recent teſtimonies in the preſent age. The celebrated Mr. Henry ſaith, "It was of old the practice of good People to ſay Amen audibly at the end of every Prayer; and it is a commendable practice ‡." Alſo the judicious Mr. Bennet affirms, that the Jews and primitive Chriſtians, both concluded their public Prayers with a loud Amen; and though this is not cuſtomary among us, it is certainly no unbecoming but decent practice ¶." See alſo the late judici-

* See their Sermon preached on this very ſubject. Morning Exerciſe Oct. 1682. Sermon 31ſt.

† Boyſe's remarks upon the Biſhop of Derry's Diſcourſe, p. 12. 50. 65. 127.

‡ See his Expoſition on Matt. vi. 13.

¶ Bennet's Sermon on public Prayer, near the end.

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ous Remarks upon a Letter to a Diſſenting Miniſter *. Nay we are informed that the forementioned laudable practice doth even in our own times conſiderably prevail in ſome of the moſt Weſtern parts of this Iſland. And what ſhould hinder its being introduced into all congregations? Will any plead that though their conſciences do indeed approve of this ſcriptural injunction and primitive practice, yet baſhfulneſs forbids a compliance with it? But ſhall a mere childiſh ſhame influence thoſe to act in religion againſt their conſciences, who glory perhaps in being deſcended from Anceſtors who *deſpiſed ſhame*, and outbraved all fear; even the fear of baniſhment, priſons, and death in aſſerting religious liberty, and the very minuteſt rights of conſcience? God be thanked, theſe rights of conſcience may now be maintained without any ſuch painful ſtruggles. We have no tyrants in Church or ſtate to denounce vengeance againſt us for attempting to drop an unſcriptural ceremony, or for adhering to a ſcriptural one. We have no unwieldy engines of ſtate to put into motion, before we can alter a ſingle pin in our frame of public worſhip; nor have we any eccleſiaſtical fetters to hamper us, except what our own bigotry and prejudices faſten upon us. Each Miniſter and his Congre-

* P. 23.

gation are at full liberty to make any alterations in their way of worſhip, which a growing inſight into God's word may dictate to them; and if we do not improve theſe advantages, ſo as to bring our public worſhip into the neareſt conformity to the Scripture pattern, that our light and knowlege may direct, ſhall we not be much more inexcuſable, than if we had no ſuch liberty and indulgence allowed us? Beſides, let us aſk, How can Diſſenters without a bluſh cenſure their Brethren of a different communion, for admitting into their public worſhip things no where enjoined or mentioned in Scripture, whilſt they themſelves omit that in their own worſhip, which is often mentioned, and ſometimes enjoined in Scripture, or how can they conſiſtently ſcruple a conformity to the former, while they refuſe a compliance with the latter, ſeeing the one has as manifeſt a place in Scripture as the other has none. Let Proteſtant Diſſenters remember, that their very diſſent from the eſtabliſhed Church, lays them under ſpecial obligations to make Scripture, and not common cuſtom, the ſtandard by which they model every, even the minuteſt part of public worſhip, according to the beſt light they have attained. If they do not this, they ſtand condemned by their principles and profeſſion.

To conclude; the grand deſign of this and ſome foregoing Chapters, is to prevail with Diſſenting

ſenting Congregations to endeavour after the moſt ſerious and ſpiritual frame of mind in public Prayer. To put their bodies into the moſt reverent praying poſture. And to conclude the whole exerciſe with a ſolemn fervent vocal Amen. And how happy would be the conſequence, if theſe things were duly attended to! Then public Prayer would put on an air of devotion and ſolemnity, vaſtly ſuperior to what it generally wears at preſent.—But Lord who ſhall live to ſee ſuch a day as this! It is an eaſy matter to convince the judgment and conſcience, of the unfitneſs of ſome practices, and the fitneſs of others: but to bring people actually off from an ill cuſtom of a long ſtanding, and to turn them into a different channel, here, here lies the difficulty. Nothing is more common, than to approve of things in empty ſpeculation, and at the ſame time to neglect them in practice. But our Lord recommended a more wiſe and conſiſtent conduct when He ſaid, "*If ye know theſe things, happy are ye if ye do them.*" John xiii. 17.

CHAP. V.

Rules of Advice, addreſſed to the Leader in Public Free Prayer.

IF free extempore Prayer be indeed ſuch an impracticable, irrational ſervice as ſome have repreſented it; we have in this chapter engaged in a very abſurd undertaking. But why ſhould that be deemed unpracticable, which we believe hath been delightfully practiſed by pious ſouls in every age; and ſtill continues to be practiſed to very good purpoſe, by multitudes of the moſt illiterate perſons in their daily family devotions? And certainly if mankind had that juſt ſenſe of their ſpiritual wants, maladies, and miſeries, which they have of their corporal ones, they would ſtand in little more need of a written Form to pray by, than of a written paper to tell their errand by when they go a borrowing, or to deſcribe their diſtreſs by when they go a begging. Thorough feelings of the heart give ſufficient utterance and eloquence to the lips. Why then is it imagined, that a pious well furniſhed Miniſter, whoſe head is a rich ſtore-houſe of knowledge, (which he hath been many years gathering) and his heart a glowing altar of fervent devotion, ſhould be incapable of lead-

leading his Congregation in Prayer for the ſpace of twenty or thirty minutes, without the uſe of a Liturgy or written Prayer.

We cannot but think, that if Miniſters would ſpend as much time in praying earneſtly for themſelves and their Congregations in ſecret, and in their families, as too many do in unprofitable ſtudies, or more unprofitable amuſements and recreations; they would not judge it impracticable, to uſe extempore Prayer before their Congregations. Yea, would but common Chriſtians ſpeak oftener of God in their daily converſations, and to him in their ſecret devotions, they would not find it ſuch an hard taſk to ſpeak to Him in their ſocial devotions.

However, for the better help of thoſe who are Leaders in public ſocial Prayer, let the following Rules be attended to.

1ſt, Above all things endeavour after a ſerious diſpoſition, and heavenly frame of mind. So needful a qualification is this to an edifying performance of this duty, that no ſtores of divine knowledge in the head, nor flow of natural eloquence from the tongue, can ſufficiently ſupply the want of it. A devout heart is the moſt eloquent orator in Prayer. It moſt pleaſes God; it beſt edifies and profits man. A praying perſon ſhould feel, as well as ſpeak. If he does not painfully

feel his ſins, how can he mournfully confeſs them? If he does not ſenſibly feel his wants, how can he be fervently importunate for a ſupply of them? And if he does not highly value, and delightfully reliſh divine favours; how can he put up ardent petitions, or return cordial thanks for them? Now none but perſons of a ſerious and religious turn of mind, can have a right feeling of all theſe parts of Prayer. If therefore we would pray feelingly, fervently, and effectually, we muſt earneſtly endeavour after a pious frame of mind. In a word, we muſt labour to become poſſeſſed of the influences of the Holy Spirit: "*For we know not what to pray for* ourſelves *as we ought, but the Spirit helpeth our infirmities, and maketh interceſſion for us*, Rom. viii. 26." Such devout frames can this Spirit of God excite in the heart, and with ſuch holy and feeling oratory can He anoint the lips, as no efforts of mere human art can equal. Have we not ſometimes heard ſuch heart-affecting eloquence flow from the praying lips of ſome plain illiterate Chriſtians, as hath almoſt as much excelled the beſt ſtudied Forms uttered by a carnal Prieſt, as a living animal excels its own lifeleſs picture.

2dly, Let thoſe who conduct ſocial Prayer, furniſh their underſtandings and memories with a ſtock of praying materials. This ſtock may be fetched

fetched in from various quarters——from the Prayers of fellow-worſhippers—from books of devotion;—but more eſpecially from the Bible, that ſacred book which was indited by the Holy Ghoſt. What a rich ſtore-houſe of praying materials have we there! Such a mixture of ſublimity and ſweetneſs is there in ſome devotional parts of Scripture, as is not to be equalled, much leſs excelled, by any of thoſe devotional Forms which are of mere human compoſure. Only in uſing our collected materials for Prayer, care muſt be taken, that we neither lean too much to them, nor confine ourſelves to one cuſtomary track in the manner of uſing them; leſt we ſink into formality, and reſtrain the free exerciſe of holy affections in the ſoul.

3dly, In order to conduct ſocial Prayer in a becoming, edifying manner, we recommend the offering up a ſecret ejaculation for divine light and aſſiſtance, immediately before we enter upon this exerciſe. Some have found much ſenſible benefit by this. Let us alſo accuſtom ourſelves to premeditation, before we addreſs the all-glorious Jehovah. Indeed, whenever Divine Providence gives us ſuch ſudden unexpected calls to this duty, as allow us no time for premeditation, we may with an humble confidence betake ourſelves to it, depending upon that encouraging promiſe in Matt. x. 19. "*Take no thought how or what ye*

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ſhall ſpeak; for it ſhall be given you in that ſame hour what ye ſhall ſpeak." But when there is ſufficient time for premeditation, we become guilty of a preſumptuous irreverence, if we ruſh haſtily into the Divine preſence, and pour out a ſet of crude addreſſes before Him; we then preſs to a throne of grace in direct oppoſition to that ſolemn Scripture-charge, "*Be not raſh with thy mouth; and let not thine heart be haſty to utter any thing before God,*" Eccl. v. 2. Remarkable is that ſaying of the ſon of Syrach, "Before thou prayeſt, prepare thyſelf; and be not as one that tempts the Lord." Do any enquire how premeditation before Prayer is to be managed? It is anſwered; by taking a general ſurvey of our own and fellow-worſhippers ſin, wants, and mercies; and by impreſſing upon our hearts, a deep ſenſe of the majeſty of that God whom we addreſs; the ſacredneſs of the duty we are to engage in; and the importance of the errand we are going upon. And if time permit, it is highly requiſite to take a full view of any peculiar caſes, which are to be ſpread before the Lord in Prayer. But after all our preparations and premeditations, we ſhould, in order to pray feelingly, fervently, and with enlargement, lean as much on the promiſed aſſiſtances of the Holy Spirit, as if we had made no preparations at all.

4thly, Let the common Speaker in Prayer make

make conſcience of putting his body into a fit poſture for this duty. For poſtures, and geſtures of the body, have as real a language and meaning in them, as the words of the lips; and are chargeable with the like reverence or rudeneſs in God's account, that reverent or rude expreſſions are. Two oppoſite poſtures there are in public Prayer, which to us appear equally irreverent; namely, a lazy lolling poſture on one hand, or the uſe of theatrical geſtures on the other. The former doth ill become a ſacred exerciſe, in which we ſhould preſent the homage of our bodies, as well as of our ſouls to God: And the latter doth as ill beſeem the gravity, and ſolemnity of a ſervice which repreſents us as indigent, diſtreſſed beggars, at the door of Divine mercy. It is, indeed, extremely odious and ridiculous, to diſplay the levity of vain-glorious actors on a ſtage, by reeling and wavering to and fro, and by affected motions either of the head or hands. That poſture in public Prayer which appears to us moſt decent and reverent, is a ſteady, fixt, and erect one, with the hands a little ſpread, and the eyes lifted heavenwards; or cloſed, in order to bar out every amuſing object. But we have with concern obſerved, a poſture widely different from this, even in ſome of the miniſterial order, who, when they preſent their own and their Congregations addreſſes to the

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all-glorious Jehovah, are all the while gazing at this, and the other object around them, or caſting their roving eyes through the whole Aſſembly. But ſurely ſuch a demeanour as this, in the Leader of public Prayer, is ſo far from tending to excite a ſpirit of devotion in his fellow-worſhippers, that it too juſtly tempts them to ſuſpect the want of it in himſelf. For a wandering eye is too great an indication of a wandering diſengaged heart.

5thly, Let the voice in public Prayer be ſo articulate and diſtinct, and the ſpeech ſo deliberate, that each worſhipper may not only hear and underſtand every part of the addreſs, but have time ſufficient to join his affections with it, before his mind is carried on to ſomething elſe. With regard to *ſpeaking with deliberation*, perſons of two oppoſite characters offend againſt this rule; viz. thoſe who want a ſerious ſpirit of devotion; and others who are very ſerious, and to an high degree devout. The former being little or not at all affected with the matter of their Prayers, are apt to hurry them over haſtily, like a thoughtleſs ſchool-boy ſaying his leſſon, and impatient to get to his play: The latter, on the contrary, are carried out in Prayer with ſuch a rapid, inceſſant flow of expreſſions, as well as affections, that they are in danger of uttering *things raſhly before God*: Their tongues do ſometimes run too faſt even

even for their own thoughts; much more for the thoughts and affections of their fellow-worſhippers, who cannot keep pace with them. A grave and deliberate delivery in public Prayer, will render the work both more eaſy to the Speaker, and more intelligible and edifying to the Hearer. In relation to the *tone of the voice*; at the beginning of public Prayer, the voice of the common Speaker ſhould be ſomewhat below its natural pitch, in caſe it can be diſtinctly heard; for this betokens more decent reverence, when he firſt enters into the preſence of the Divine Majeſty; it alſo allows him liberty to raiſe his voice in the progreſs of the ſervice in proportion as his devotion riſes. In other particulars we are ready to think, that the beſt help and rule for modulating the voice in public Prayer, is a devout heart, deeply impreſſed by the ſeveral parts of Prayer. If the heart rightly feels, and laments the ſins which the tongue confeſſeth, the confeſſory part of Prayer will be uttered with a ſomewhat mournful plaintive voice; though not with a whining tone; for that is odious. And if the ſoul is indeed cheared and elevated by thoſe mercies which ſound from the lips in Thankſgiving, that branch of Prayer will be carried on with a more quick and lively voice, than the confeſſory part of it; though not in a light and airy ſtrain, which is highly unbecoming. As to the petitionary and pleading parts of Prayer,

Prayer, theſe ſhould be accompanied with a conſiderable degree of vehemence and ardour; and will be ſo, if we are ardently deſirous of the favours which we aſk in Prayer.

6thly, The language in which we addreſs the Divine Majeſty in ſocial Prayer, ſhould be plain, but not mean; decent, but not gaudy; elegant, but not bombaſt: which laſt eſpecially, as it betrays great vanity and affectation in the Speaker, naturally gives diſguſt to the judicious hearers; and ſo becomes an hinderance inſtead of help to their devotion. All harſh uncouth expreſſions, all awkward ridiculous compariſons, which have a tendency to ſuggeſt low and groveling ideas, rather than to convey pure and ſublime ſentiments: likewiſe all little turns of wit, more tending to excite merriment than ſerioufneſs, ſhould be wholly excluded from this grave exerciſe. Again, all hard words, and crampt myſterious phraſes, ſhould be ſtudiouſly avoided in this devout ſervice, wherein we are to repreſent the ſenſe of the plaineſt and moſt illiterate Chriſtian, that joins with us in Prayer. Prolix and laboured ſentences, eſpecially ſuch as include parentheſes, ſhould have no place in this duty, although they be repleniſhed with ever ſo much ſubſtantial and inſtructive matter. For they require ſo much labour and attention from the underſtanding, that the exerciſe of the

the affections, which are the very ſoul of Prayer, muſt of courſe be checked thereby, if not totally ſuſpended. Let our language then in ſocial Prayer be ſo plain and conciſe, as well as pious, that the matter of Prayer may paſs eaſily through the underſtandings of our fellow-worſhippers, and immediately ſtrike their affections; like rays of the Sun, whoſe heat is ſuch a cloſe attendant upon its light, that it is almoſt difficult to perceive which of them is the ſooneſt felt by us. On theſe accounts we recommend Scripture language to the imitation of every praying Chriſtian, ſeeing it is inimitably grand and lofty, and oftentimes plain and familiar at the ſame time. Beſides, it is that which all ſerious Chriſtians are accuſtomed to; and therefore more intelligible, as well as more agreeable to them. And ſurely that language muſt be moſt pleaſing to God, which came from Him, and was indited by Him. But let the devout Chriſtian who loves his Bible, and is much converſant with it, take it in good part, if we caution him againſt a faulty extreme, which ſome are inadvertently led into, by their laudable endeavours to adopt Scripture language into their Prayers; we mean their injudiciouſly introducing ſuch obſcure Scripture phraſes into ſocial Prayer, as directly refer to antient Jewiſh cuſtoms, which the major part of common Chriſtians cannot be

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ſuppoſed to have any knowledge of; ſuch as theſe, *Purge me with hyſſop, and I ſhall be clean. Take away all iniquity, ſo will we render the calves of our lips. Send the rod of thy ſtrength out of Zion. From the womb of the morning, let Chriſt have the dew of our youth.* Theſe, and many other Scripture phraſes, equally unintelligible to moſt perſons, without a learned comment, may not only be heard from the lips of Miniſters and private Chriſtians, but may even be ſeen in ſome celebrated treatiſes, which have been written upon this ſubject. But certainly, to introduce ſuch dark and myſterious Scripture phraſes into public Prayer, and ſo to make them the language of our moſt ignorant fellow-worſhippers, is little better than putting them, like Romiſh prieſts, upon praying over an equal number of Latin words.

7thly, The Matter of ſocial Prayer is next to be conſidered. Now this muſt neither be ſo ſcanty, as to ſtarve the devotion of our fellow-worſhippers; nor ſo very full, as to overpower their narrow capacities. A ſcantineſs of matter, is a very culpable defect, even in family worſhip; nevertheleſs, if a family Prayer happens to be too ſcanty on one day, its defects may be ſoon made up by the frequent returns of that exerciſe on following days. But when a Miniſter has perhaps but one

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day in a whole week, publicly to repreſent the many and various caſes, not merely of a ſingle Family, but of a whole Congregation in Prayer, he becomes exceedingly blame-worthy, if, according to the manner of ſome, he ſpend the chief part of the time allotted to this duty, in expatiating upon four or five topics only in a preaching, circumlocutory ſtrain; pouring forth a flood of words, with little or no variety of matter. But while we juſtly cenſure ſome public Prayers for the ſcantineſs of their matter, and for being of too narrow extent, we almoſt equally blame others for containing too much variety of matter. To us it ſeems not to anſwer the chief deſign of Prayer, to ſkim over a great many topics, and paſs haſtily from one thing to another, without dwelling on any thing. Such Prayers reſemble ſkeletons of dry bones, which have neither fleſh upon them, nor animal moiſture in them. The thoughts and affections of thoſe who join in ſuch Prayers, are hurried ſo faſt away from one thing to another, that they have not ſufficient time to catch the ſacred flame of devotion. In order to avoid theſe two extremes, we adviſe the Leader of ſocial Prayer to dwell and expatiate upon two or three topics, which moſt feelingly concern the preſent caſes of thoſe who join, or the circumſtances of

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the times*; and to paſs over other matters with quicker diſpatch, in order to take in the greater variety of caſes. But to proceed,

As we recommend a due medium between a too great fulneſs and ſcantineſs of matter in the ſame Prayer; ſo alſo between a conſtant ſameneſs and perpetual newneſs of matter in different Prayers. As to thoſe who practiſe a perpetual ſameneſs almoſt in every Prayer, pacing over the ſame dull track, ſabbath after ſabbath, we reckon it a diſgrace both to their parts and their piety; and an injury to the devotion of their fellow-worſhippers. We think the motion of the ſoul through the duty of Prayer, ſhould not reſemble the motion of a lifeleſs engine, which is uniformly the ſame, every time it is ſet on going. But muſt the Leader in this duty cut open a new road, and muſt his Prayer appear in a dreſs entirely new every time he goes to a throne of grace? It is anſwered; as few private Chriſtians, nay few Miniſters are bleſt with ſuch rich furniture, as to bear the vaſt expence of matter and expreſſion all over new in every addreſs to heaven; we adviſe none to be

* The adapting of Prayer to particular times, caſes, and new riſen important emergencies, is, we think, the peculiar privilege of free extempore Prayer, and the chief glory of it; and therefore ſhould never by any means be omitted. When we obſerve ſo many of our modern pulpit-prayers deſtitute of this brighteſt ornament, we regret the loſs, and long to ſee it reſtored.

too

too anxious in attempting ſo hard a taſk, leſt they only perplex and burden their own minds in Prayer, without adding any thing to the devotion of their fellow-worſhippers. When perſons affect to bring both new matter and expreſſion into every praying addreſs, their Prayers are generally leſs ſubſtantial. Beſides, this tends to carry the taſte of novelty in their fellow-worſhippers too far; to excite their curioſity more than their devotion; and to entice away their thoughts only to gaze at thoſe new images, which are perpetually paſſing before their minds in a Prayer; and ſo to put a total ſtop to thoſe devout exerciſes of the heart, which are the very ſoul of Prayer. Under this head of advice, we might naturally bring in diſputable matters, and dubious events, as the ſubject matter of Prayer. But theſe deſerve a ſeparate conſideration. Therefore we adviſe,

8thly, That all dubious events be either wholly excluded from ſocial Prayer, or very cautiouſly introduced: as alſo diſputable doctrines wherein even upright Chriſtians diſſent from one another. Our lot is indeed caſt in thoſe unhappy times of the Chriſtian Church, when almoſt every diſtinguiſhing goſpel truth is objected againſt and denied by ſome perſons, who may attend public worſhip; therefore all diſputed doctrines cannot be wholly excluded from our public Prayers, without excluding Chriſtianity itſelf from them.

But ſtill one eaſy warrantable method whereby all juſt offence and cenſure may be cut off, even from the moſt contrary minded fellow worſhipper, is by uttering thoſe controverted doctrines in the language of ſcripture, and juſt as they ſtand in our Bibles.

It is farther adviſable, that all particular ſtate-matters, the ſubjects and occaſions of party-ſtrife, be excluded from our public Prayers; likewiſe all doubtful events of a public nature; ſuch as newly received reports concerning battles fought, and their various events either Victory or Defeat. When matters of this nature are brought haſtily into public Prayer, and before they become more generally known, (which is ſometimes the caſe) they are not only very liable to be expreſſed with impropriety on the Miniſter's part; but tend alſo to throw the greateſt part of his congregation into a ſurprize; and make them immediately fall to political muſings and queſtionings with themſelves. Will not their thoughts leave the preſent duty of Prayer, and run to and fro from one ſeat of war to another; from ſea to land, and from land to ſea again; inſomuch that they can no more be ſaid to pray at this time than reading a News-paper can be called Prayer *? Moreover as news of

* N. B. In order to avoid inconveniencies of this ſort, we judge it adviſable, that before either defeats or

of this kind is ſo frequently miſrepreſented in its firſt reports; (eſpecially in the article of victories won by the ſide which makes a report of them,) a too haſty notice gives ſome occaſion to the adverſaries of extempore Prayer to inſult and triumph in this ſtrain of a late ſcurrilous Writer. "Many a time has God been thanked in public Prayer, for giving us glorious victories when we have been ſhamefully beat: for inſpiring courage into our troops, when they have run away; for ſucceſs granted to our arms in battles never fought; and for deliverances from plots which were never formed."

9thly, The *method* and *manner* of conducting public Prayer, claims a place in this ſhort Eſſay. But of this we ſhall ſay the leſs, becauſe ſo much hath been ſaid on this head, and withal to ſuch very good purpoſe in two very excellent Treatiſes on Prayer, with which the celebrated Biſhop Wilkins and Dr. Watts have favoured the world.

or victories are introduced into the Miniſter's public Prayers, the caſe be briefly publiſhed to the whole Congregation before Prayer begins. An equal, yea greater neceſſity is there for ſick members of a Congregation to be named, and their afflicted caſes publiſhed to the Congregation, before thoſe caſes are brought into public Prayer: for, beſides its avoiding the forementioned inconveniencies, it will more fully direct the ſerious part of the Congregation to pray for ſuch at their own reſpective homes, as well as to viſit the ſick perſons at theirs.

Only we beg leave to offer a few directions upon theſe topics. Here then we adviſe that public Prayer be moderately methodical; becauſe this at once aſſiſts the memory of him who officiates; and more eaſily enters the underſtandings of thoſe who join with him. And yet, we caution our Readers againſt an over-much exactneſs of method; for this both clogs the affections of the Speaker, and tends to excite diſguſt, rather than devotion in the minds of the Hearers. For whatever appears very artificial in Prayer, carries the air of affectation; and affectation is ſo near akin to hypocriſy, that the leaſt appearance of it is diſtaſteful; eſpecially in that ſerious and ſolemn exerciſe, in which we have to deal immediately with the heart-ſearching God *. Another direction we ſhall offer on this head is, not to paſs through the ſeveral parts of Prayer (ſuch as Confeſſion, Petition, and Thankſgiving) in a bare general manner; but to expatiate upon and enforce them, according as time and circumſtances will permit. In confeſſing ſin, let it not ſuffice to ſay only in general terms, "that we are ſin-

* An heart inſpired with warm devotion, will not be confined to exact method; and a lively ſtart of thought, and a ſtrong ſurpriſing ſentiment uttered out of it's due place, will ſtrike the minds of our fellow-worſhippers ſo ſtrongly, that they will not attend to the want of method, or if they do, will readily excuſe it. Vid. Maſon's Student and Paſtor, Pt. 2. ch. 5. p. 94.

ners," but let us bring in the ſeveral aggravating circumſtances of our tranſgreſſions; for though this will not add any thing to the knowledge of God, it will greatly add to our devotion, and that of our fellow-worſhippers. Again, in petitioning favours, let it not content us barely to enumerate thoſe particular things which we deſire in Prayer; but let us enforce our petitions with all thoſe moving pleas and arguments, with which the word of God hath largely furniſhed us. How often do we find Scripture ſaints pleading with God in Prayer? Sometimes they plead his name and divine attributes as a motive with Him to appear for them, and for his own cauſe, Pſ. lxxix. 8, 9, 10. "*Let thy tender mercies ſpeedily prevent us, for we are brought very low: help us, Oh God of our ſalvation, for the glory of thy name; wherefore ſhould the Heathen ſay Where is their God?*" In other places we find this generation of ſeekers urging former divine deliverances, as a plea with God to grant future ones. Iſa. li. 9, 10. *Awake, awake, put on ſtrength, O arm of the Lord; awake as in antient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it which hath dried the ſea, the waters of the great deep, that hath made the depths of the ſea a way for the ranſomed to paſs over* *?

Thus

* While we thus warmly recommend a pleading with God in our Prayers, we would as warmly remonſtrate

Thus we have ſelected a few Scripture ſpecimens of this moſt moving part of Prayer, viz. pleading, to the intent they may become both patterns and motives with us, to *go* and *do likewiſe*. The reaſon why we have been ſomewhat larger upon this topic, is, becauſe we reckon *Pleading* one of the moſt heart-moving faith-ſtrengthening parts of Prayer; and that the unaffecting dryneſs of many public Prayers which we have heard in theſe times, is very much owing to their being very defective in this article. Next to *Pleading* in Prayer, we reckon little ſhort invocations, often reiterated at proper intervals, to be great enliveners of public Prayer. With theſe the Prayers of Scripture ſaints are frequently interſperſed. Sometimes the ſame emphatical words or ſentences, are repeated twice or thrice together. Of this we have multiplied inſtances in David's book of devotions; alſo in our Saviour's

againſt preaching to men in them. To pray in a preaching ſtrain, is a cuſtom too often practiſed by ſome ſerious, well-meaning Chriſtians; but withal, exceeding culpable. It betrays a ſpirit quite oppoſite to that of an humble ſupplicant at a Throne of Grace, when a perſon forgetting, as it were, his own ſins and wants, and his need of ſupplies from the Divine fountain, runs out into ſuch a preaching and teaching ſtrain, as argues a ſpirit of ſelf-fulneſs and ſelf-ſufficiency. In a word, theſe preaching Prayers deſtroy the very nature of Prayer.

Prayer

Prayer on the Croſs, Matt. xxvii. 46. *My God, my God, why haſt thou forſaken me?* See alſo another ſpecimen in Daniel's Prayer, Dan. ix. 19. *O Lord hear; O Lord forgive: O Lord hearken and do*, &c. Now this repeating the ſame emphatical word or ſentence every now and then in a Prayer, betokens a peculiar fervency in the ſpeaker, and a moſt ardent deſire to have the requeſt granted. It is alſo a relief both to the ſpeaker and others who join in ſuch a Prayer: For neither the invention of the former, nor the attention of the latter need be ſo continually on the full ſtretch, as when there is a continual movement from one ſort of matter and expreſſion, to another and different ſort. Beſides liberty is hereby given for the affections to ſpring forward and exert themſelves in a more full and free manner.

N. B. Upon this topic the caution of Dr. Watts is both ſeaſonable and needful; namely, that we diſtinguiſh between thoſe repetitions which ariſe from real fervency of ſpirit, and thoſe which are uſed merely to lengthen out a Prayer; or which ariſe from mere barrenneſs of heart, and want of matter: for this latter ſort are in the number of thoſe vain repetitions, which our Saviour condemned, and called heatheniſh, Matt. vi. 7.

We have now laid down ſo many rules of advice for the aſſiſtance of him who leads on public

worſhip, that it may ſeem high time for us to deſiſt. Only our performance will be deemed defective, if we drop not a few hints upon the length of public Prayer. Here then we ſhall briefly obſerve, that Divine Service appears to us moſt amiable, entertaining, and edifying, when its ſeveral parts are diſcreetly proportioned; (i. e.) when the devotional parts, conſiſting of Prayer and Pſalmody, do, upon the whole, preſerve an equality with miniſterial inſtructions; namely, reading and explaining the Scriptures, together with ſermonizing. Conſequently, we judge it an high degree of vanity, bordering upon prophaneneſs, for the public Speaker to preſent a little ſcantling offering of Prayer to Almighty God, on purpoſe to make room for *Self* to ſhine the longer in a prolix ſermon.——On the other hand, a Congregation will find too much cauſe to ſuſpect that ſloth and negligence have been their Miniſter's companions the foregoing week, if he tediouſly lengthens out his public Prayer, in order to put off his people with a ſermon, which has little in it beſides an exordium and concluſion.—But after all, conditions and circumſtances are ſo variable, that it is extremely difficult to fix any invariable ſtandard reſpecting the length of a Prayer.—No doubt a Miniſter ought to be a little ſhorter or longer in that exerciſe, according

as

as God has endued him with more copious or ſcanty praying abilities--He may alſo ſhorten or prolong a Prayer, juſt as he feels enlargement or ſtraitneſs in the exerciſe itſelf.—For we reckon it highly improper for any to confine themſelves always to one invariable meaſure, leſt they either check the ſpirit of devotion in themſelves on one hand, or try the patience of their fellow-worſhippers on the other. It was the ſaying of an eminent Epiſcopal Divine, "The ſhorteſt Prayer is too long, which like the echo, is *vox et preterea nihil*; i. e. nothing but an empty ſound: but the longeſt is ſhort enough, where the mind and heart hold out to the end; and the devotion is as long as the ſupplication." Only prudence itſelf ſhould direct the Leader in public worſhip, be he in ever ſuch a lively frame, not to prolong Prayer to ſuch an unſeaſonable length, as to create an undue proportion between the other parts of the public ſervice.

28 OC 62

The

The CONCLUSION.

HAVING now finiſhed what we had to propoſe upon this important ſubject, we ſubmit the whole to the impartial judgment of every ſenſible and candid Reader; hoping he will do us the juſtice, of putting a favourable conſtruction upon our deſign in this undertaking. As to the peeviſh and cenſorious part of mankind, to us it is a matter of ſmall moment, what judgment they will paſs upon our performance. Such liberty have we taken in animadverting upon what appeared faulty, both in Liturgic Forms and Free Prayer, as practiſed in our day, that our Readers may eaſily diſcern, we have not deceitfully courted the univerſal approbation and applauſe of the rigid advocates for either mode of worſhip. So far as we know our own hearts, our chief aim hath not been to make bigots to a party, either by condemning or applauding in the groſs; but to inveſtigate truth: not to magnify and boaſt of what is already right; but, which is more uſeful, to correct what we take to be ſtill wrong. To this purpoſe, we have with great freedom pointed out the defects and blemiſhes which attend the pre-

preſent mode of conducting Free Prayer both in Miniſters and People: this we have done, not with a view to diſparage Free Prayer, but to reſtore it to an higher degree of purity and perfection. And when it ſhall pleaſe the Lord to *pour out the Spirit of grace and ſupplication* upon his people in a richer abundance, we may comfortably expect to ſee great improvements in the *Gift*, *Grace*, and *Decorum* of Prayer, the ſpirit of primitive piety revived amongſt us, and the devotion of Chriſtians appearing with more attractive beauty, luſtre, and glory in the eyes of all the admiring world.—Haſten, O Lord, thoſe happy and deſirable days!

FINIS.

ADDENDUM.

THough the Example and Authority of our bleſſed Lord be alledged in defence of the practice of ſitting at Table, when a Bleſſing is aſked, and Thanks returned, and has been taken for granted; (Page 98.) yet we beg leave to obſerve, that it does not certainly follow that our Lord and the Multitude ſat in the caſe there referred to,* no more than it follows, that our Lord and his Diſciples when the Sacramental Supper was to be adminiſtered, though they did at firſt ſit down, did not afterwards put themſelves into a worſhipping poſture, when the worſhipping part of that ordinance came on, viz. bleſſing the elements; which few we imagine would call in queſtion. Suppoſe in a parallel caſe, we ſhould invite a number of friends to ſit down with us at Dinner; the form of invitation would not imply that they were to ſit at the time of begging the bleſſing, but only at the time of eating.

28 OC 62

* Matt. xiv. 19.

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